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Becoming Learners across Contexts:  
Kosovo Postgraduate Students' Transformative Study  
Abroad Experiences in the UK

by  
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A dissertation submitted to the  
School of Political Science and Sociology  
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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
DES	Department of Education
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
KEDP	Kosovo Education Development Programme
KESP	Kosovo Education Strategic Plan
KFOR	Kosovo Forces
LAS	Learning Activity Survey
LDK	Democratic League of Kosovo
MED	Municipal Education Department
MEST	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PES	Parallel Education System
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNMIK	United Nations Mission in Kosovo

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree.

## ABSTRACT

This study examines transformative learning dimensions in the context of study abroad. The research uses an integrative approach of transformative learning theory to explore the learner identity transformations of 16 participants from conflict-affected Kosovo as they participated in postgraduate studies in the United Kingdom and subsequently, on their return to Kosovo, as they integrated their experiences in their workplaces. The study adopts the narrative inquiry strategy and the active interviewing method to capture participants' experiences in three phases: prior experience in Kosovo, experience in the UK and re-integration experience in Kosovo. The research employs the narrative analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006) consisting of seven steps: 1) open coding; 2) categorisation of codes; 3) coding on; 4) data reduction; 5) generating analytical memos and writing; 6) data validation; and 7) data synthesising.

Identity transformation is theorised as a process of 'becoming learners across contexts' involving: 1) learner identity construction dynamics of entanglement; and 2) internal and external tensions in identity conflict, maintenance, negotiation and projection, when engaging with Kosovo and UK communities of practices. Findings suggest that changing learning contexts creates possibilities for engaging with similarities and differences between contexts and identity transformations through: Shaping Learner Identity, Transforming Learner Identities at the Boundaries and Integrating Identity Transformations across Contexts.

For learning to be transformative, it needs to involve changes in three dimensions: ways of knowing, of being and of interacting. Its outcomes may be positive or negative representing ongoing struggles, resilience and strategies between forces of continuity and change and interaction between the individual and the social environment. Institutions receiving international students ought to consider the cultural background, academic skill mismatch and language on student epistemology and learner identity.

**Key Words:** Transformative Learning, Identity, Integration, Study Abroad, Boundaries, Kosovo, UK

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- How many words have you written? What is appropriate (more or less)?
- When do you know that it is good enough?
- What happens after you finish?

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Study abroad has been used as a human capital development strategy for many new states and developing countries in their attempts to facilitate societal change (Flack, 1976; Fry, 1984; Selvaratnam, 1993; Solimano, 2002). This strategy has been used by Kosovo and its international donors in the past two decades, in order to help sustainable post-conflict development. Study abroad is defined here as a cross cultural education programme bearing credits or leading to a formal qualification (Savicki, 2008) whereas human capital refers to “people abilities, knowledge, and competences” (Keeley, 2007, p.29) that shape the productivity of the work force and income generation ability that bring social and private returns (Blundell et al, 1999). Societies investing in the development of human capital through study abroad scholarship programmes expect to benefit from specialised knowledge and skills, western experience and the personal and institutional connections that these individuals develop (Selvaratnam, 1993; Goodwin, 1993). Besides expectations to occupy leading positions in their countries, scholarship beneficiaries are often expected to contribute to the improvement of national institutions, especially educational institutions. This strategy, however, also entails risks, such as brain drain (Horvat, 2004) and artificial implementation of western mind-sets in local contexts (Selvaratnam, 1993), thereby questioning the success of such investments for developing countries.

In questioning the benefits and risks, literature raises different aspects of study abroad experiences such as: the influence of prior educational experiences in successful study abroad experiences (Hofstede, 1986, Taylor, 1994), the effect of the study abroad on the individual (Shougee, 1999, Williams, 2006), the tensions around the relevance of new knowledge, technological skills and know-how for the home country (Goodwin, 1993) and integration of new knowledge, skills and values in the home country (Yanrong Chang, 2009, Xiang and Shen, 2009). From a learning perspective, it is also suggested that changing learning contexts

enables cross cultural learning and identity shifts (Reay, 2010). These changes are often associated with challenges integrating prior learning experiences which are deeply rooted in local culture (Hofstede, 1986). Thus, investigating study abroad as a development strategy, including the impact at the individual level, offers to inform policy relating to planning, investing, implementing and undertaking study abroad programmes.

A growing range of literature links study abroad to significant changes in students' lives, arguing that new relationships and practices within different learning and cultural environment can support personal development, individuation and perspective transformation ( Lin and Cranton, 2005; Dirkx et al., 2006; Cranton and Wright, 2008; Savicki, 2008, Taylor, 1994; Erichsen, 2009). Many studies consider the development of intercultural sensitivity and preparation for global competitiveness to be the main benefits of study abroad (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2011, Taylor, 1994, Gill, 2007, Park, 2002). Cross cultural experience helps students develop “ a different eye”, when comparing the meaning of language, behaviour and daily life (Montuori, 2008,p.12). According to Montuori (2005, p. 383), culture also influences how scholars approach a subject by shaping researchers' assumptions and lenses. In this way, cross-cultural experience in an academic context can extend not only personal boundaries, but also disciplinary boundaries. Therefore, the study abroad journey has the potential to facilitate personal, social and disciplinary boundary crossing. In other words, study abroad has the potential for true transformation.

### **Problem Statement: Study Abroad as a Development Strategy**

Kosovo is a landlocked country in the central Balkans. It has a surface of 10,887 (km<sup>2</sup>) and borders Albania, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro. It is one of the most densely populated countries in Europe,<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kosovo has approximately 1,739,825 inhabitants (163 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>) with 61 % of the population living in rural areas. Albanians comprise 92% of the population while other nationalities make up the remaining 8% (Serbs, Bosniaks, Turks, Roma and other). At 95%,

with the youngest population in the continent.<sup>2</sup> Although it aspires European Union membership, Kosovo is the most isolated country, ranked the 99 in the Global Ranking Visa Restriction Index (Henley and Partners, 2016) with visa free access to only four countries in Europe (Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro and Turkey) and visa-free or visa on arrival access to 38 countries and territories worldwide.



**Figure 1** The World Fact book 2013-14. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2013.

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Islam is the dominant religion, followed by Orthodox Serbs and a minor Catholic Albanian group.

<sup>2</sup> Forty-two percent of Kosovo's population is below the age of 19 (Statistical Office of Kosovo, 2011).

Source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html3>

Kosovo declared independence in 2008 after a one-century self-determination dispute with Serbia, which culminated in an armed conflict in 1998-99. Following the NATO Air strikes against Serbia, Kosovo was placed under the administration of the United Nations, until 2008. Apart from being a post-conflict setting, since 1999, Kosovo has transitioned from a centrally controlled economy dominated by Serbia, to a market based economy (Kosovo Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). Initially, due to a high level of destruction, Kosovo's economy was over-dependent on international donations, as well as on the Diasporas for financial and technical assistance.<sup>4</sup> Immediately after the emergency period in 2000, the international community placed the focus in creating and transforming Kosovo's public institutions<sup>5</sup>. Education was one of the sectors mostly affected by decades of communist rule, by the period of violent disintegration of former Yugoslavia throughout the nineties, and finally, by direct armed conflict in Kosovo.<sup>6</sup>

As a result, Kosovo lacked the human capacity and domestic educational institutions to create the human capital needed for transformation of Kosovo from a war-torn society into a country with stable and well-functioning institutions, capable of grasping the development needs of society. Therefore, the development of qualitative human capital was and is still considered essential for economic growth, for increasing the employment rates, as well as for social benefits and Kosovo's stability (The

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<sup>3</sup> **Copy right information:** <https://www.cia.gov/about-cia/site-policies/#copy>

<sup>4</sup> Kosovo received over 2 billion USD of foreign assistance between 1999 and 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Immediately after the emergency period in 2000, fiscal and trade, policies and the banking system were completely transformed. Socially owned enterprises were privatised and small and medium enterprises developed. Kosovo laws were changed and aligned with European Laws and Kosovo became a member of CEFTA, IMF, World Bank and EBRD.

<sup>6</sup> A detailed account of Kosovo's Education Landscape will be given in Chapter 2

World Bank, 2007, Kosovo Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013, The Office of Prime Minister, 2016).<sup>7</sup>

Historically, migration for Kosovans has contributed to alleviating poverty, and supporting overall family survival. However, migration intentions after the war, changed to include education, employment and opportunities for better living conditions (Cipuseva et al., 2013). Accordingly, migration has become valuable for bringing new skills, knowledge, and values, as well as expertise gained through work and education experiences abroad from a number of higher education scholarships schemes.

In response to the need for the development of human capital, the international community and later the Kosovo government, adopted the educational development strategy, addressing simultaneously universalisation of basic education and providing advanced higher education opportunities (Selvaratnam, 1993,p. 63). These strategies aimed to strengthen basic education and literacy, numeric and problem solving skills as well as to develop advanced knowledge and skills at institutional level through study abroad programmes. In addition to physical reconstruction of the country, structural institutional reforms and capacity building training, the international community provided considerable

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Kosovo remains one of the poorest countries in Europe (The World Bank, 2013) with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of about €3000 and with remittances from the diasporas accounting for about 13% to 17% of GDP(The World Bank, 2011; UNDP, 2012; International Monetary Fund, 2015, The World Bank 2016). The Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2016) reported an unemployment rate of 32.9% for the year 2015. This rate is contested on the methodological approaches in reporting nonparticipation rate. The unemployment rate is calculated to be around 45 % (UNDP, 2014; Abdixhiku, 2016). According to Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2016) 1.2 milion inhabitants are of labour active age. KSA reports 37.6% labour participation rate and 62.4% labour non participation rate.

funding for cross-cultural learning programmes at home and abroad in the framework of economic development support aid. Cross-cultural programmes included study abroad scholarships, fellowships, study trips, internships, summer schools, and other exchange programmes. For example, a number of study abroad scholarships were funded by UK scholarship schemes, European Commission Scholarship Scheme, Kosovo Austrian Partnership Programme, Canadian Educational Development Programme and US Scholarship Schemes within the brain-gain development strategy.

In spite of some evidence suggesting that return migrants and scholarship beneficiaries were more employable and took positions in government or other institutions (Cipuseva et al., 2013, UNDP, 2006, UNDP 2014, Young Cell Scheme, 2015), there is little structured and ready-available information found in the alumni or sponsor websites on the realisation of the intended outcomes by these scholarships. While scholarship beneficiaries were selected based on criteria such as grades, English competency and work experience or affiliation, there is limited information about their experiences in social and learning environments abroad or academic difficulties they may have faced as a result of their experience. The Young Cell Scheme Report (2015, p.59) highlights some of the challenges, such as recruitment, ethics, policy and implementation and organisational culture. However, the report only briefly mentions experiences during study abroad reporting them as difficulties in engaging with the new system and as an opportunity to bring the experience back in Kosovo. It states:

The differences are perceived in a minor part as a potential obstacle to the learning process (mainly in the first phase of the Master programme), but mainly are perceived as an opportunity to: “absorb the new methods of teaching and bring their experience here [i.e. Kosovo]. The system for me was a boom, because it was a very big change”.

(Young Cell Scheme, 2015, p.59)

While the study abroad scholarships are established as a brain-gain development strategy, there is no analysis of the impact of educational policies and study abroad experiences on learner identities in Kosovo. There is no research to evaluate differences in education opportunity from the learner's perspective in order to understand the possibility of study abroad to influence scholarship beneficiaries and consequently to bring the desired changes in the Kosovo workplace.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The central purpose of this research is to explore identity transformation and integration resulting from study abroad experience. The research investigates narratives of 16 Kosovo Albanian<sup>8</sup> scholarship beneficiaries who studied on postgraduate programmes in the UK. The following research questions are articulated:

- 1 In what way did Kosovo postgraduate scholarship beneficiaries experience study abroad as potentially transformative learning experiences through participation in UK universities?
- 2 How do participants integrate their identity transformation in their professional practice in Kosovo?

These questions focus on adult postgraduate students who embarked on a study abroad experience in the UK and returned to Kosovo afterward. The first question centres on uncovering the process of meaning making in situations where students may be challenged by contextual differences between Kosovo and the UK. These differences mainly arise from cultural, social and economic conditions in Kosovo that shaped participants' ways of knowing and being. It also assumes that the UK study abroad experience is potentially transformative, changing the way participants view themselves, their world, their perspectives and their resulting actions. This necessitates

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<sup>8</sup> Kosovo Albanian is a term referring to Kosovo citizens of Albanian ethnicity. As they comprise 92 % of the total population, I will refer to participants interchangeably as Kosovans, Kosovo Albanian and Albanian.

paying attention not only to the processes that students undergo in the UK, but also to their perspectives and their ways of being prior to departure, that had already shaped their identity. Therefore, the study interrogates the participants' previous education experiences to understand shared elements of subjective experiences, as recounted individually.

The second question interrogated the consequent study abroad experiences of participants and implies a connection between the participants' past, present and future behaviours. It focuses on the workplace and the way participants integrate new knowledge, skills and values in their professional lives.

Therefore, the research questions are extended as follows:

- What is the profile of participants?
- How do participants describe their educational experience and their learning development in Kosovo?
- Do participants share meaning perspectives as a result of their social, economic, cultural and educational backgrounds?
- Why did participants choose to study in the UK?
- How do participants describe their educational experience and self-development in the UK?
- How do participants make meaning out of their study abroad experience?
- How do participants make sense of who they and others are at an individual level, interactional level and institutional level, in the UK and in Kosovo after returning (Jenkins, 2008, p. 39)?
- To what extent, if any, have participants experienced change and what is the outcome of the experience in the UK?
- How do these experiences influence professional practice in Kosovo after their return?

These questions encapsulate prior and current circumstances that affect learners' meaning making and action (Mezirow, 1991). Therefore, the study

abroad experience in the UK, as another context, can play the role of an activating event, leading to learner identity transformations within reciprocal interaction between learners across contexts.

### **Learning as Transformation**

This research looks at the individual and the ways that engaging in transformational learning brings about new ways of knowing, doing, and being. The research questions the extent to which study abroad experience, as an activating event, interacts with transformative learning possibilities in influencing individual and societal change. There are five important issues in understanding the dynamic nature of transformative learning within this research: 1) the influence of prior experience, 2) the contribution of the study abroad experience to transforming learner identity, 3) its gradual process, 4) transformational learning as agentic and 5) the context of ordinary settings. This questioning offers insights into the role of transformative learning as facilitator of individual capacity within changing societies. Therefore, addressing the integration of experiences of participants in Kosovo will help understanding of the dynamics of context and relationships that affect both individual change and agency, and change in larger systems (Wilson and Kiely, 2002, Taylor, 2009).

Learning is a life-long process of becoming, in interaction with others in the on-going, changing contexts of family, school, institution, workplace and community (Jarvis, 2012). As individuals and contexts change, the learning process presents a dialogical relationship between individual desire and motive to learn for one's own benefit, and the education system that uses learning to influence behaviour, beliefs and actions of individuals within the society. In the socialisation process, individual agency is more externally dominated during childhood (Erikson, 1980; Mezirow, 1991). Children learn at school and at home under the influence of adult supervision and community culture. Such contextual factors and social organisation promote environments of conformity, in which joint and situated meanings are framed.

Mezirow explains the process of framing through the term 'frame of reference', which includes worldviews, expectations, values, beliefs and concepts, in which meaning making is organised (Mezirow, 2009, p. 124). Similarly, Hofstede (1986) argues that role patterns such as, parent/child, woman/man, student/teacher, boss/subordinate and authority/member, result from collective programming on how the roles are performed in a particular society. These roles influence one another and influence identity development (Illeris, 2013). In this way, much of what is learned in childhood is internalised through cultural transfer shaping. When reaching youth, individuals have a shaped identity with a developed sense of who they are in the world (Erikson, 1980).

In adulthood, learners become more independent and self-directed, gradually developing and practicing other roles, such as professional and family roles taking control and responsibility over their lives (Cranton, 2016). Adult learners, defined here as people over the age of 18 engaged in educational activities beyond compulsory schooling, have different purposes and needs (Merriam, 2001, Hansman and Mott, 2010). Although this definition categorises adults as legal subjects in many countries, the literature suggests that there are complexities in defining transition to adulthood because of the interpretation of different markers of adulthood. Some of the markers include independence, self-direction, responsibility, job possession and parenthood, recognising the differences among cultures, historical conceptions of adulthood over time, changes in the population demographics and differences in quality of education and life (Iacovou, 2002, Klein, 1990, Brooks, 2012)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup>An Adult according to 'Law on Adult Education and Training in the Republic of Kosovo', NO. 04/L-143, 2013 is any person reaching the age of fifteen (15), although persons reaching age of 18 gain the right to vote. Participation in high school (usually ages 15 to 18) is 97 % and participation in higher education is 62, 7% (for students aged 20-24 excluding University of Mitrovica and Serb Population in Northern Kosovo) (Rexhaj and Pupovci, 2015) thus implying another transition between formal schooling and University. The adult, defined as beyond 18 years of age, is a legal interpretation and does not include

Besides formal higher education settings, transition to adulthood includes learning contexts and experiences of all kinds including professional development activities and training (Sandlin et al, 2010. p.1). As learning is a life-long process and happens in different contexts and ages, it is not always linear, accumulative, or similar in nature, content, level and intensity. For example, because of globalisation and the advancement of technology, we are witnessing an increase of study and learning opportunities and necessity to engage in full-time, part-time and online/distance or blended learning modes. There is also an increase of study abroad, student exchange and cross-cultural learning programmes all over the world (OECD, 2015; Ortiz et al, 2015). As we identify ourselves in relationships with other individuals or groups in a certain context, changing learning contexts and engaging in different learning experiences enables a transformation of experience (Kolb, 2014, Jarvis, 2012).

In explaining the complex process of how adults construct meaning, Mezirow (1991) identified an explanatory gap in learning theories between the process of reflection of prior learning and its justification in meaning making in adulthood. He argued that unlike children, adults could question previous learning and engage in conscious, intentional, and deeper learning that can lead to significant and irreversible changes in their development (Mezirow, 1990). He introduced transformative learning as "learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open and emotionally able to change"(Mezirow, 2009, p. 22). Frame of reference, which is interchangeably used with the term meaning perspective, is a mind-set which combines meaning schemes

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other markers of adulthood such as: independence (residential and financial), having a job, getting married, creating a family, triggering events (living in poverty, experiencing war or losing family members, illness), and other factors (demographics, family structure, economic conditions and societal conditions). In Kosovo, average marriage age is 23 and life expectancy increasing from 67 year before the war to 71 after the war (World Bank, 2015). The family share household, and in most of the cases, the parents (elderly) live together with at least one of their children. Young couple cohabitation before marriage is a new trend only to be found in the capital of Kosovo.

(knowledge, concepts, values, attitudes, beliefs, judgments and feelings) as “boundary structures” that influence perception, remembering, meaning making and action in certain contexts (Mezirow, 1991, p. 5).

In relation to learner identity, Illeris(2013) and Jarvis(2011) argue that Mezirow’s definition is limited only to meaning perspectives and does not cover other factors, such as intuitive, emotional and regressive dimensions of transformative learning. Their definition of transformative learning extends Mezirow’s definition to learning that changes the identity of the learner.

“Learning is both formative and transformative: it can occur in the cognitive, emotive and action domains; it can be rational, intuitive, extra –rational or even irrational. It is part of the process of life itself, the outcome of which is a living person-you and I being continually transformed either pro-actively or reactively through learning.”

*(Jarvis, 2011, p. 26)*

“The concept of transformative learning comprises all learning that implies change in the identity of the learner”

*(Illeris, 2013, p. loc 1074)*

Defining learning as a process of becoming recognises the interaction between external influences and individual agency as “meaning making”, which involves content, knowledge, understanding and skills shaping the learner functionality, incentives, motivation, emotions, volition shaping the learner sensitivity, and interaction with environment, referring to actions, communication and cooperation that enable social integration (Illeris, 2007,p.29). According to Illeris (2007), learning is the core dimension of the identity that enables “coherent development of meaning, functionality, sensitivity and sociality” involving interaction between the individual and the social environment (Illeris, 2007, p.139).

In relation to identity, according to Jenkins(2008, p. 17), interaction dynamics make identity a “process of identification in the human world

containing individual order, interactional order and institutional order, through comparison of similarity and difference” in time and space. Jenkins further argues that identity is “neither totally fixed nor totally fluid” but the process of becoming in context and in interaction. Jenkin’s (2008) concept, although it does not draw from learning theories, concurs with the concept of ‘community of practices’ in which shared histories of learning are conceptualised as an interaction of individual and society over time (Wenger, 1999,p.86):

“Practices evolve as shared histories of learning. History in this sense is neither merely a personal or collective experience nor just a set of enduring artefacts and institutions, but a combination of participation and reification intertwined over time”

(Wenger, 1999, p. 87)

The process of interaction in these definitions of identity and learning, imply that although identity undergoes changes, changes are problematic, as they require integration of prior and new experiences within and across communities of practice or contexts.

Transformative Learning Theory promotes agency in a way that concurs with the “learning way” approach introduced by Kolb and Kolb(2016,p.1) which is “about approaching life experiences with a learning attitude” involving “a deep trust in one’s own experience and a healthy scepticism about received knowledge. Concurring with Illeris (2007) the “learning identity” according to Kolb and Kolb (2016) is a core dimension of identity as it influences life experiences and challenges.

A learning identity lies at the heart of the learning way. People with a learning identity see themselves as learners, seek and engage life experiences with a learning attitude and believe in their ability to learn. Having a learning identity is not an either-or proposition. A learning identity develops over time from tentatively adopting a learning stance toward life experience, to a more confident learning orientation, to a learning self that is specific to certain contexts and ultimately to a learning self-identity that permeates deeply into all aspects of the way one lives their life. This progression is sustained and nurtured through growth producing relationships in one’s life.

(Kolb and Kolb, 2016, p.1)

In relation to context of learning, Hofstede(1986) argues that learning is deeply rooted in the culture of the society and when changing learning contexts, learners face four problematic areas:

1. Differences in the social positions of teachers and students in the two societies
2. Differences in the relevance of the curriculum (training content) for the two societies
3. Differences in profiles of cognitive abilities between the populations from which students and teachers are drawn
4. Differences in expected patterns of teacher/student and student/student interaction

(Hofstede, 1986, p. 303, original emphasis in numbering)

While Hofstede (1986) mentions content and interaction dimensions, the individual incentive is vaguely incorporated into “social positions of teachers and students” referring to roles. When new learning or context does not fit within a meaning-making framework, our sense making necessitates a deeper understanding of this incongruence or some sort of reorganisation in order to make an inference. This process, however, requires learners’ readiness and engagement to assess long held beliefs, attitudes and behaviour to validate, change and integrate new contexts. The integration process poses difficulties, as individuals need to negotiate their personal, social, and cultural realities. This infers that the process requires agency on the part of the learner, time, reinforcement and negotiation with the environment (Wenger, 1999; Illeris, 2007; Akkerman and Bakker, 2011). It is suggested here, that transformative learning is a type of learning that challenges the learner to change and thus involves changes in learning identity in relation to learners’ knowledge and abilities, learner motives, learning practices and learner interaction with other individuals and social settings.

### **Researcher’s Conceptual Framework**

Creswell (2003, p. 5) suggests that the conceptualisation of research design necessitates that the researchers address three central questions:

“What knowledge claims are being made by the researcher (including the theoretical perspective)? What strategies of inquiry will inform the procedures? What methods of data collection and analysis will be used?”

(Creswell, 2003, p. 5)

Knowledge claims have to do with the assumptions researchers have with regard to the nature of reality or knowledge (ontology), and how we know (epistemology). This infers that the design strategy is influenced by the conceptual framework of the researcher in the preliminary phases of research, starting from the idea, the researcher’s concrete experience and interest.

My interest in this study stems from four experiences:

- 1) My working experience at the International Office at the Public University in Prishtina in Kosovo between 2002 and 2006<sup>10</sup>. During this period, I had contact with students earning scholarships in foreign universities. When meeting them after returning, students conveyed not only academic difficulties but also changes in their worldviews and perspectives.
- 2) My own post-graduate study abroad experience in Ireland between 2005 and 2007 in the field of adult learning and development. During my studies, I was particularly interested in transformative learning theory. However, my interest in transformative learning theory increased after I graduated, as it provided a more inclusive opportunity to broaden my understanding of my own study abroad experience integration.
- 3) My working experience in a private college as a quality officer and later as director for academic planning and international cooperation. In these roles, I worked with a number of staff members who had completed MA and PhD studies abroad, mainly in the UK, Austria, and the USA. In this environment I was actively engaged in comparing my own experience with that of other colleagues who studied abroad in order to better

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<sup>10</sup> University of Prishtina is the first public university established in Kosovo in 1969. Website: [www.uni-pr.edu](http://www.uni-pr.edu).

understand the impact of study abroad experiences in our practice. In addition, within my regular work at the Quality Assurance Office, I found narratives of education experiences to be of great value in understanding learners' needs, performances, and skills in comparison with self-administered evaluation questionnaires. This was particularly important because of the oral culture of education in Kosovo.

4) My experience on a regional research study in 2009, "Brain Circulation and the Role of the Diasporas in the Balkans"(Cipuseva et al., 2013) within which I was engaged in a survey of highly skilled returnees. As I was preparing my research proposal for the PhD programme, participation in a regional study within a research institute associated with my current workplace, provided an opportunity to inquire into educational migration and identify and recruit research participants. In addition, it offered understanding of student profiles and their migration experience. This study underlined the need for further research as to how the returnees are implementing the knowledge and expertise gained abroad in Kosovo institutions, and what is determining their satisfaction and willingness to stay. With the same sample of students, I also collected survey responses employing an adapted version of the King's educational activities questionnaire (King, 2009). The data revealed that the education experience abroad for some participants not only developed professional knowledge and skills but also challenged existing worldviews (Qirezi, 2011). However, the survey included students from all scholarship schemes and resulted in descriptive analysis, which did not provide in depth analysis of the student experiences.

This experience was important in my research strategy decision, as it concurred with Maxell's (1998) conceptual framework questions:

"What do you think is going on with the issues, settings or people you plan to study? What theories, beliefs, and prior research findings will guide or inform your research, and what literature, preliminary studies, and personal experiences will you draw on for understanding the people or issues you are studying?"

(Maxwell, 1998, p. 216)

Seeking understanding on how adults make meaning of their study abroad experience and how this experience influences their development, the study was approached from the Transformative Learning Theory as a theoretical lens consistent with the problem of the study and the background of the researcher (Anfara and Mertz, 2006). Transformative Learning is constructionist by nature and assumes agency. This concurs with the view that reality and knowledge are actively constructed in context. Therefore, the study does not attempt to verify a theory. Rather, it uses the theory as a lens, in conjunction with the researcher's background and interests. This lens is then modified in interaction with participants' lived and narrated experiences.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study intends to contribute to the literature on the ways learning contributes to identity shaping, transformation and integration. Focusing on the differences between Kosovo and UK contexts, the study aims to investigate the impact of changing contexts on learner identities in view of the identified need to offer study abroad opportunity as a development strategy.

As there are limited studies in Kosovo investigating learning, learning differences and international learning contexts for any scholarship schemes operating in Kosovo, this research will provide insights into Kosovo Scholarship beneficiaries' study abroad experiences. Existing publications consist of mostly reports of the sponsoring or implementing agencies that focus only on the efficiency of the management of the scholarship schemes. Moreover, the majority of studies in the UK have targeted Asian students, with little focus on studying the experiences of the Kosovo student population.

Importantly, this study contributes to the study abroad literature through its focus on the relationship between study abroad and the transformation of student identity. More specifically, the study contributes by questioning the

extent to which study abroad experience, as an activating event, interacts with transformative learning possibilities. The study therefore intends to offer insights into the role of transformative learning in facilitating individual capacity within a changing society in Kosovo.

### **Organisation of the Thesis**

This thesis is divided into eight chapters:

1. Introduction
2. Kosovo Educational Landscape
3. Literature Review
4. Methodology
5. Shaping Learner Identities
6. Transforming Learner Identities at the Boundaries
7. Integrating Identity Transformations across Contexts
8. Conclusions

**Chapter One** has introduced the geographical, political and socio-economic position of Kosovo and the research problem, research purpose, and questions as well as highlighted the significance of the study.

**Chapter Two:** Kosovo Educational Landscape provides a contextual background in which participants' learner identities are shaped prior to study abroad experience in the UK. The chapter draws on the review of policy documents and reports to explore the main transition points in the reciprocal role of education and the wider socio-political context in shaping societal developments in Kosovo. The chapter interrogates the aims of education and expectations from the perspective of different stakeholders. It also discusses and the outcomes of educational policies in shaping identity consciousness and society emancipation, survival and transformation.

**Chapter Three** discusses and reviews the theoretical debate on transformative learning in general and specific research studies that explored transformative learning in study abroad contexts. First, the chapter argues that individuals' interaction with the social world is part of an inseparable identification process, and are effectively studied using an integrative lens. Secondly, the review of study abroad experience through the theoretical lens of transformative learning identifies processes and outcomes resulting from the tension of change and integration. Finally, gaps and further questions raised in the literature are identified.

**Chapter Four** rationalises the narrative inquiry research design and the active interview method including its strengths, weaknesses, and limitations. It also describes the procedures undertaken to collect, and analyse interview data, using the thematic analysis method introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006). The chapter presents phases of data collection and analysis through examples to illustrate the complexity and rigour of qualitative research design. It also underlines the relevant ethical considerations and strategies used to protect participants and present the research report.

**Chapter five, six and seven are substantive chapters that** present and discuss research results using the temporal, space and relational context of participants' experiences in three main areas: *1) Shaping Learner Identities; 2) Transforming Learner Identities at the Boundaries and 3) Integrating Identity Transformations across Contexts*

**Chapter Five: Shaping Learner Identities** explores how identity is shaped in different contexts in Kosovo through the analysis of 16 Kosovar participants' narratives. It focuses on how identity is constructed and reconstructed through learning and the internal and external dialectics in identity entanglement. It explores the influence of the broader context of Kosovo as a conflict and war torn society in participants' education experience and their national and learner identity. The chapter explains the learner identity shaping as entanglement through four themes: *1) Being Albanian in Kosovo, 2) Being a Learner in Kosovo, 3) Learner Selfhood, and 4) Learning and Professional Trajectories.*

**Chapter Six: Transforming Learner Identities at the Boundaries**

explores the identity work at the boundaries. The chapter investigates participant's learning experience in the UK as an activating experience that challenges learner's ways of knowing, being and interacting within the different frame in which participants perform as learners, leading to four main experiences: 1) *Being Overwhelmed*, 2) *Exploring Student Role*, 3) *Questioning Personal Epistemology* and 4) *Performing Student Role in Relationships*

**Chapter Seven: Integrating Identity Transformations across Contexts**

explores the process of identity integration across contexts. The chapter identifies four main categories emerging from the narratives that explain the process of integrating identity transformations across contexts. These are: 1) *Gaining Professional Status* 2) *Contextualising Identities* 3) *Contemplating Professional Roles* and 4) *Transforming Realities*.

**Chapter Eight: Conclusions**

summarises the findings and discusses implications for transformative learning theory and education institutions, scholarship agencies, employers and students in Kosovo. The chapter also presents limitations of the study and proposes further research possibilities.

## **CHAPTER 2: KOSOVO EDUCATION LANDSCAPE**

This chapter examines the role of education in shaping the collective Kosovo Albanian identity and Kosovo human capital in changing historical, political, social and cultural circumstances. In doing so, the chapter investigates the ways in which social and political stakeholders have negotiated education goals and how this negotiation has shaped learners and the education system (institutions and curriculum) in the Kosovo territory in four main transition points from 1800 to today. The main argument is that education is an agent for individual and societal transformations. However, education may represent a conflict or duality in terms of the purposes of learners and of the education system and as such, it has both agentic and constraining dimensions in shaping identities. Accordingly, education in Kosovo has influenced the construction and recapture of national Albanian identity. At the same time, education experience stemming from constraining political, social and economic circumstances may be interpreted as contributing to the underdevelopment of Kosovo's human capital.

The literature on Kosovo education published in Kosovo, Serbia and former Yugoslavia is often conflicting because of national or ideological distortions of certain aspects of Kosovo history, including that of education (Guzina, 2003, Malcolm, 1998). These distortions stem from identification processes and power relations between Kosovo citizens and authorities, state formation processes and other external influences. The education system in Kosovo remains underdeveloped compared to other countries in the region due to education disadvantages mismatch of education policies and education practice and conflict. In this view, this chapter identifies four periods marking transition points in the role of education and its relationship between social and political stakeholders from the Kosovo Albanian perspective.

1. Education as identity consciousness (1800-1967)
2. Education as emancipation (1968-1980)

3. Education as survival (1981-1999)
4. Education as transformation (2000-2016)

This periodisation is based on the review of policy documents and research and media reports. This chapter intends to facilitate the exploration of the individual dimensions of education experience in the Kosovan context and the assumed individual change resulting from study abroad experience. As identity is constructed in society, transformation of society through the education of individuals is interrelated with complex social, cultural, organisational, structural and power relations at different levels. The discussion will attempt to explain the socio-political developments that affected the level of the development of education in Kosovo and its consequent influence in shaping national identity and human capital.

### **Education as Identity Consciousness (1800-1967)**

Using Jenkins' (2008, p. 5) definition of identity as a "process of identification in the individual, interactional and institutional level" it is suggested that education provides learning and socialisation opportunities through which identities are shaped. In the case of Kosovo, prior to the establishment of the Albanian state in 1912, education played the role of raising identity consciousness<sup>11</sup> or what Freire terms "conscientizacao" referring to "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and take action against oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 17). Although Albanians in the Balkans were distinguished from other peoples through their language,<sup>12</sup> culture and customs governed by the traditional law 'Kanun,'<sup>13</sup> lack of education in the native language threatened assimilation and precipitated an identity crisis (Rexhepagiq, 1968).

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<sup>11</sup>The Albanian word used was "vetëdije" [ENG] consciousness

<sup>12</sup>Albanian Language is an Indo-European language of a distinct branch. See <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Albanian-language> (Hamp, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> The Code of Leke Dukagjini governed almost aspects of Albanian social life. It was first published in 1913 by Shtjefen Gjecov, a Franciscan priest who collected oral transmission of the customs in northern Albania. See translation in English (Fox, 1989).

The identification of Albanians during the Ottoman occupation as Muslims (Rexhepagiq, 1968; Malcolm, 1998),<sup>14</sup> along with the repressive policies against them during the Yugoslav Kingdom,<sup>15</sup> led to limited critical awareness on how to improve their position in the Balkans. In the absence of education in Albanian, education abroad helped to raise consciousness about the Albanian nationhood among Albanian intelligentsia in the diaspora, including some Muslim and Christian clergymen. These circles raised national Albanian awakening and inspired overall intellectual and political mobilisation for Albanian national resistance in the Balkans (Malcolm, 1998).

The Albanian National awakening movement, “Rilindja”<sup>16</sup> during 1870-1912 promoted a unified Albanian national identity and aimed to improve the position of Albanians within the Ottoman Empire. Albanians, educated in Turkish, Greek and Italian schools, opened schools in Albanian, published literature, unified the Albanian alphabet and promoted the idea of an Albanian nation state.<sup>17</sup> Education was viewed as the cornerstone of this ideal. Typical for a period of literary romanticism and social illuminism, identity work was manifested through teaching reading and writing in the Albanian language and by transmitting messages of national awareness through songs, poems and oral literature that glorified the Albanian

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<sup>14</sup>With majority of population converted into Islam, a distinct Albanian identity was not recognised by Ottoman authorities, which recognised only distinctiveness of non-Muslim religious groups. The Millet system was based on structural autonomy of religious groups and did not recognise ethnic groups Malcolm(1998).

Identified as Turks, Albanians did not benefit from the 1856 Ottoman law that allowed communities to set up public schools and from the later 1869 School Law that allowed teaching in the local language. Rexhepagiq (1968).

<sup>15</sup> See Cubrilovic, V (1937). Memorandum: The expulsion of Albanians. Belgrade: Cultural Club in English translated by Robert Elsie.  
[http://albanianhistory.net/1937\\_Cubrilovic/index.html](http://albanianhistory.net/1937_Cubrilovic/index.html)

<sup>16</sup>[ENG]Rebirth

<sup>17</sup> The League of Prizren (Prizren is a city located in Kosovo) is a historic meeting where delegates from Albanian territories which initiated a national wakening. See Resolution of the League of Prizren in English (Elsie, no date)  
[http://www.albanianhistory.net/1878\\_League-of-Prizren/index.html](http://www.albanianhistory.net/1878_League-of-Prizren/index.html)

language and the Albanian homeland. This general mobilisation for national awakening through education is best illustrated by the appeals to learn the Albanian language by Konstantin Kristoforidhi and Lazer Lumezi, teachers in the first Albanian School in Kosovo:<sup>18</sup>

“Albania will not be learned and will not enlighten or civilize with a foreign language, but with its mother tongue, the Albanian language”

(Kristoforidhi, 1888, in Albanian Academy of Science, 2002, p.248)<sup>19</sup>

The teacher asks students:  
"How did people live without schools and how do they live now, for example we as Albanians ..."  
What language do you speak at home?  
Why do you speak Albanian?  
Where were you born?

(Lumezi, 1892, in Rexhepagiq, 1968, p.234-235)<sup>20</sup>

Efforts for education in the Albanian language were characterized by actions that sought to overcome the “limiting situations” (Greene, 1982, Freire, 1970) that were imposed by the ruling authorities. For example, the 1913 London Conference decision to redraw the borders in the Balkans, by which more than half of majority Albanian-inhabited territories were recognized as sovereign territories of Serbia, Greece and Montenegro, resulted in the development of multiple Albanian identities, with far-reaching consequences in education development.<sup>21</sup> In the figure 2 Kosovo is shown before the establishment of an Albanian state and after the establishment of an Albanian state.

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<sup>18</sup>Kristoforidhi (1827-1895) was the author of the first Albanian Dictionary and Albanian ABC primer and translated the Old and New Testament in Albanian.

Lumezi (1870-1941) educated in Loretto College in Italy, was a teacher and author of the first teaching methodology manual in Albanian language in Kosovo.

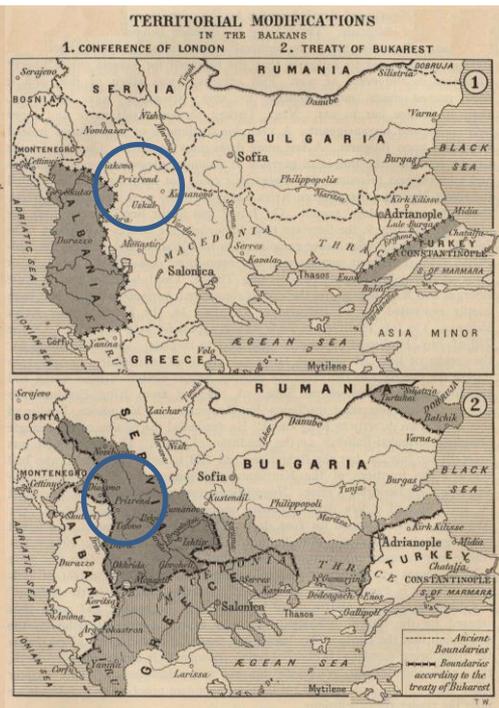
<sup>19</sup> Translated by the author of this thesis

<sup>20</sup> Translated by the author of this thesis

<sup>21</sup> The 1918 Versailles Peace Treaty created the Serb-dominated Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, re-named Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929.



**Figure 2** Balkan States 1899



**Figure 3** Territorial Modifications in the Balkans - Conference of London [May 1913] and Treaty of Bukarest [August 1913]

Note: The circled territory is an approximation done by the author of this thesis for the purpose of illustration.

Source :

Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin [https://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/balkan\\_states\\_1899.jpg](https://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/balkan_states_1899.jpg)

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In the following period (1912-1939), identity was further threatened by banning education in the Albanian language (1929 Law on People's Schools) and by other forms of violence, including land confiscation, deportation, killings and forcible emigration (Rexhepagiq, 1968, p. 268-269,

<sup>22</sup> Permission details: [https://www.lib.utexas.edu/usage\\_statement.html](https://www.lib.utexas.edu/usage_statement.html)

Malcolm, 1998, Vickers, 1998). However, to counteract external limitations, according to Kostovicova(2002, p. 160) even intentions to suppress national Albanian identity in this period through religious identity reinforcement, produced the opposite result, as Catholic and Muslim priests taught Albanian reading and writing secretly thereby prioritising Albanian identity over religious identity. As this poem typically promoted by teachers reveals, education was seen as a way of strengthening the national identity:

“Wake, Albanian, from your slumber,  
Let us, brothers, swear in common  
And not look to church or mosque,  
The Albanian's faith is Albanianism! “

Pashko Vasa, 1878 (Translated by Elsie, no date)

In this way, identity suppression through violence after ”Rilindja” only generated mobilisation and resistance towards Yugoslav authorities among Albanian people, who struggled to maintain their Albanian identity (Shema, 2000, Malcolm, 1998). In the turmoil of the Second World War, Albanians took advantage of the annexation of three parts of the territory by Italy, Germany and Bulgaria (Vokri, 1990, Malcolm, 1998) to establish an Albanian education system. Supported by the Albanian Government, teachers from Albania set up schools, literacy programs, trained Kosovo teachers and promoted Albanianism(Gjevori, 1998). Education, amidst turmoil of war and state building processes, assisted identification and national consciousness(Shema, 2000, Malcolm, 1998).

Conflicting claims over the territory between Serbs and Albanians had significant implications for the identity of Albanians in Kosovo. According to Kostovicova (2005), space in terms of defined territory and claims over territory are “key markers of nationhood”. For example, with

the end of the Second World War in 1945,<sup>23</sup> even though the Albanian identity was formally recognised, it was once again suppressed by Yugoslav identity construction based on territorial definition. Albanians, as the majority in Kosovo, were categorised as a nationality, a second order of citizens in comparison to Serbs, who were categorised as a nation in Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav identity imposed on Kosovo was perceived as unjust domination, because of the lack of rights for national identification or use of national symbols, cultural rights or native language education (Rexhepagiq, 1968).

The new Yugoslav education system may be interpreted as contributing to the suppression of identity dimensions related to national, religious, linguistic and cultural identification. It furthered class-based beliefs and attitudes of the Yugoslav Communist government, contradicting interwar Albanian education activities that promoted Albanianism. However, The unique Yugoslav public education system, which adopted a Soviet Union model of education, promoted mass expansion of literacy and education (Kostovicova, 2005) while at the same time used education as a tool to control and conform (Heyneman, 1998). According to Heyneman(1998) the Soviet model emphasised natural sciences over social sciences as grounds to promote atheism and politically correct scientific interpretations. Similarly, the communist party in Yugoslavia viewed education as a tool to promote and embed its values in all organisational structures at all levels:

“The task of communists is to continue to educate working people so that they could more independently and more directly manage society, think and act socialistically in practice until every individual citizen learns to run the works of the social community.”

(Tedesic, R. Tdesic, Stanojevic, Bojalica, and Vukovic. 1946 in Malešević, 2002, p. 54)

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<sup>23</sup> Kosovo Albanians remained in the Socialist Yugoslav Federation due to the decision of unelected communist leadership in Prizren at the known as Prizren Assembly from 8-10 July 1945(Kecmezi, 2015).

However, conflicting interpretations of identity resulted in a mismatch of policies with practices. Official policies tended to deny national and religious identification<sup>24</sup>(Demi, 2005)<sup>25</sup> through the promotion of Yugoslav identity in schools and schoolbooks. However, for Albanians, Yugoslavism was more problematic because of their non-Slavic identity and their aspiration to be part of an Albanian national homeland. In addition, practices contradicted provision for inclusion of children in the compulsory education, as parents viewed schools as “Serbian schools” and communism as having Slavic-based ideology (Vokrri and Potera, 1998) mainly because of instruction in a non-native language.<sup>26</sup>Consequently, education was more than equality of opportunity; it played the role of raising awareness about political, social and economic changes that produced injustice and class stratification based on ethnic identification. This awareness enabled the evolution of education as a tool of emancipation (De Lissovoy, 2010).

### **Education as Emancipation (1968-1980)**

The process of emancipation involves agency in articulating and enacting actions against constraints and domination. Albanians perceived education in the native language as a means of taking control of their development and changing their position within Yugoslavia. In Kosovo, in 1968, opposing actions were expressed in massive protests for education in the Albanian language and for constitutional changes. Continued protests resulted in the new constitution in 1974 (Kuvendi i Krahinës Socialiste

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<sup>24</sup> A) Law on obligatory education, 1947,

B) Resolution signed by Muslim priests

C) Law on banning Muslim cover, 1951

<sup>25</sup> Demi’s claim seems to reduce restrictions for national and religious identification only to Albanians. The policy of promotion of Yugoslavism was widespread.

<sup>26</sup> Due to initial lack of Albanian teachers, although instruction in Albanian was allowed, many schools provided education through teachers of Serb ethnicity.

Autonome të Kosovës, 1974) which introduced national self-direction<sup>27</sup> and extended decentralisation to Kosovo through the status of an autonomous province (Kuvendi i Krahinës Socialiste Autonome të Kosovës, 1974, p. 324; Malcolm, 1998). Questioning authority and raising voices in collective action gave Albanians political and cultural rights and embedded native language in education and work. In addition, removing the language barrier by involving Albanian teachers and using Albanian textbooks enabled emancipatory changes in Kosovo society.

The most significant resultant change was social mobility, which created possibilities for development. Besides urbanisation and industrialisation, there was significant growth of comprehensive schools at the primary level, gymnasiums and secondary level vocational and technical schools. Jobs at the industrial complexes and new institutions were established. New prospects for education and work modified previously held family and social roles, especially for women. Education marked a transformational shift from what constituted a dominantly rural, agricultural and crafts class to the creation of a working class in industry and a middle class of public servants. Education was both socially emancipatory, as it provided a means for Kosovo citizens to run their institutions, and technically relevant for the workplace, because it made possible the realisation of cultural capital.

However, the emancipatory efforts in strengthening national identity were contradicted by the communist party's authority over education institutions that aimed to inculcate an ideology through the education system, curriculum and the education experience, especially in the human and behavioural sciences. The Party system influenced identification, cultural and historical presentations (Enti Krahinor i Perparimit te arsimit dhe te edukimit, 1974) and monitored what school textbooks, articles,

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<sup>27</sup> Workers self-management (Allcock, 2012)  
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/654783/Yugoslavia/228362/The-second-Yugoslavia>

research studies and other school material transmitted. The communist ideology prevailed in all school activities, including school theatre, choir, recitals, and other arts and literature events (Luzha, 2013). The promotion of Yugoslav identification by the communist party contradicted the fulfilment of the strived for Albanian identity and therefore hampered internalisation and integration. Castells (2011, p. 7) argues that “identities are sources of meaning for actors themselves”, thus cannot be imposed without a negotiation and integration. Freire(1970, p. 4) further adds that integration requires “not only the capacity to adapt to reality but also to make choices and transform that reality”. In addition, as education alone could not compensate for the economic disadvantage and unemployment of Albanians in Yugoslavia, its emancipatory effects could not be sustained due to social and economic circumstances and conflicting relationships of social actors that impeded integration.

### **Education as a Struggle for Survival (1980-1999)**

In conflicting political climates, education becomes a struggle between opposing political actors. On one hand, the Serbian government viewed Albanians’ increased access to education at all levels as a threat (Malešević, 2002) and on the other hand, Albanian people, who considered access to education a right, recognised that the status of a fully-fledged republic would provide for more independent economic planning that would take into account the needs of Kosovo society (Hasani, 1981, in Malcolm, 2002: 336). With the death of the Yugoslav communist leader, Tito, in 1980, nationalistic tendencies in Yugoslavia, as well as demands for Albanians’ separation, re-emerged. The forceful clampdown on the widespread Albanian protests in 1981 by the federal police uncovered the struggle for domination vs. separation based on ethnic identification. The protests triggered political events that marked a new era for Kosovo people in general, including the Kosovo education situation.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>On 23 March 1989, Serbia abolished Kosovo’s autonomy and took control over education.

The general turmoil that ensued affected education significantly, through the struggle to survive against oppressive social, political and economic circumstances. The struggle between Albanians and Serb officials was initially manifested over forced curricula and school control issues (Pula, 2004; Shema, 2000). After Kosovo schools refused the forced curriculum approved by the Serbian government, the struggle escalated in 1989 when Albanians were segregated in primary schools and student dormitories and Albanian teachers were not paid. Finally, in 1989, after the Serbian Government abolished Kosovo education laws, the Kosovo people were politically mobilised within the peoples' movement known as "The Democratic League of Kosovo" (LDK). The movement ultimately led to the Kosovo Parliament declaring independence in 1990 and approving the new Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo. Consequently, the Serbian police expelled teachers and students from secondary schools and university premises and education institutions. Therefore, what started as a conflict for school control, ended as a Kosovo political mobilisation for independence.

Education in this period played a key role in Kosovo's peaceful resistance against Serbian rule. A separate education system from that managed by Serbia was created and administered by the Kosovo Government in Exile resulting from Presidential and Parliamentary elections in 1992. The Parallel Education System (PES) organised schools in private houses, cellars, mosques and shops and was financed by the 3% voluntary contribution which made up 90% of the total Kosovo Government budget (The Independent International Commission in Kosovo, 2000). While the Ministry of Education in exile paid salaries to teachers at the pre-university level, the University was financed through student fees (Koliqi, 1995). Albanians were subjected to systematic dehumanising violence through arbitrary arrests, beatings, imprisonment, killings and destruction of property (Bellamy, 200; Pula, 2004). Thus, the PES maintained not only schooling, but also fostered the endurance of Albanians, during threatening political circumstances.

Despite the negative consequences of the parallel education system on teacher and student development (Justino, 2011), it is argued here that education, as a peaceful strategy in unusual circumstances, facilitated the development of resilient teacher and learner identities. Apple (2013) and Illeris(2013), argue that people facing situations where their existence is threatened strengthen projected identities from a future perspective. Luzha (2014), investigating music teacher identities and Slinn (2008), investigating English teacher identities in Kosovo, argue that while teachers faced security challenges and professional development crises during PES, they also managed to participate in resistance and protection practices. The teachers “took on extra roles and responsibilities” making the teaching profession one of the most respected and risky professions in Kosovo (Slinn, 2008, p. 118). In this way, for Kosovo Albanians, regularly attending school in difficult, strange and risky circumstances, on one hand constrained their learning and development potential, yet on the other hand, they resisted threats and helped to maintain their learner identity while also making possible identity projection

### **Education as Transformation (2000-2016)**

The Kosovo example illustrates the political dimension of education and its potential to transform a society (Apple, 2013). However, in raising the question of whether education can change society, Apple (2013) raises further questions, such as what counts as transformation and for whom. Transformative learning is defined as “learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open and emotionally able to change" (Mezirow, 2009, p. 22). The process is associated with challenge, critical reflection and self-direction resulting in perspective transformation. Following this definition, education entails learning systems, programmes and practices in institutions thereby implying an intention of those who organise education to support ontological and epistemological changes in learners through learning opportunities that foster transformative learning. This definition implies planning for systemic and individual change through education but does not clearly explicate how

education intentions are implemented in practice. For learners, transformative learning intentions must be meaningful to enable engagement rather than imposition.

After the war in 1999, the purpose of the education reform was to promote a civil identity through the projection of Kosovan and citizenship identity. The international administration faced a difficult task to maintain peace and stability after the violence, destruction, refugee crisis and tragic human loss, which occurred over the years of conflict.<sup>29</sup>The NATO intervention and the international custodianship under UN resolution 1244 that ended the war, did not resolve Kosovo's status, representing an unfulfilled identity for Kosovo Albanians and an identity threat for Kosovo Serbs(Kostovicova, 2005). Consequently, peace and reconciliation efforts necessitated a projection of a new Kosovo multi-ethnic identity, which would be recognised by both Albanians and Serbs.<sup>30</sup>Education once again became a corner stone in transforming Kosovo society by taking an important role in peace-building efforts.

Although the education reforms in Kosovo after the war were often referred to as transformational (Winchester, 2010, Carusetta, 2010), they seemed to be externally instigated by the international community and internally resisted by the Kosovan post war leadership and institutions.

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<sup>29</sup> According to the Kosovo State Archives Publication (2010,p.48) during the period 1998 until 12 June 1999 there were a total of 11,480 people killed among Albanian, Bosnian and Turkish ethnic community, from which there were 7790 civilians murdered, 1353 civilians missing and 2337 combatants killed.

According to the Belgrade-based Humanitarian Law Centre estimate, between March and December 1999, Kosovo's toll was 13,321 killed and missing people, from which, about 2000 were combatants from both sides and the rest civilians ("New Kosovo War Victims Report Released," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. October 7, 2009). About 10,000 were Kosovo Albanian civilians and 1,000 – 1,500 were Serbian and other civilians including Roma, Turks, Bosniaks and other.

<sup>30</sup>Kosovo anthem has no text as declaration of independence was conditioned with keeping Albanian identity as one of many ethnic identities. Kosovo flag contains no Albanian symbols or colors and is widely contested by the Albanian population as imposed flag.

Additionally, the reforms did not go through a reflective or participatory process, and consequently, they created tensions between different social actors and failed to promote the kind of learning that expands consciousness, promotes active citizenry and sustainable development. A rejection of the Kosovan identity by the Serbian community institutionalised a division of the two independent systems, one controlled by UNMIK administering education in Albanian and other minority languages and one controlled by Belgrade administering education in Serbian language (UNMIK, 2001). Despite this separation, the international community and Kosovo institutions prior and after independence continued with the same proclaimed transformative educational agenda as a foundation for building an open and tolerant society, projecting Kosovan identity. Hence, the following analysis focuses on transformation efforts of the education system that were organised by Kosovo institutions, according to the laws approved by Kosovo's parliament and excludes the Serbian parallel education system. The Kosovo Education System resulting from changes in legislation is presented in table 1. The table offers comparison of the Kosovo Education system with that of Ireland and of the UK to offer contextual understanding.

**Table 1 Comparison of Education Systems (Kosovo, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and Ireland)**

Stages of Education/ Employment	NQF Kosovo http://www.akk-ks.net/		NQF Ireland www.qqi.ie		NQF England, Wales and Northern Ireland www.qaa.ac.uk		EQF
	Level		Level		Level		Level
Pre-primary education	0	Pre-school			0	Entry Level 1, 2 (ages)	0
Basic education	1	Primary School (Grades 1-5)	1	QQI Level 1 Certificate	0	Entry level 3 first certificate, GCSE - grade D, E, F or G	1
		Music School (Grades 1-4)	2	Level 2 Certificate			
Initial entry into employment or further education	2	Lower Secondary (grades 6-9)	3	SEC Level 3 Certificate	1	CSE - grade 1 GCSE - grade A*, A, B or C intermediate apprenticeship level 2 award; level 2 certificate; level 2 diploma; level 2 ESOL; level 2 essential skills; level 2 functional skills; level 2 national certificate; level 2 national diploma; level 2	2
		Music grades 5 -8 Lower Secondary Certificate		Junior Certificate			
Progression to skilled employment. Continuation of secondary education. Qualified /Skilled worker Entry to higher education Completion of secondary education Specialised education and training	3	Upper Secondary Vocational Schools (grades 10-12); Music Schools (Grades 1 (10)-3(12)) Vocational School Certificate	4	Level 4 Certificate, Leaving Certificate	2	CSE - grade 1 GCSE - grade A*, A, B or C intermediate apprenticeship level 2 award; level 2 certificate; level 2 diploma; level 2 ESOL; level 2 essential skills; level 2 functional skills; level 2 national certificate; level 2 national diploma; level 2 NVQ; music grades 4 and 5; O level - grade A, B or C	3
	4	Upper Secondary Education Gymnasium (grades 10-12); Matura Exam VET Matura	5	Level 5 Certificate, Leaving Certificate	3	Secondary Education A level - grade A, B, C, D or E access to higher education diploma advanced apprenticeship applied general AS level international Baccalaureate diploma level 3 award; level 3 certificate; level 3 diploma; level 3 ESOL; level 3 national certificate; level 3 national diploma level 3 NVQ; music grades 6, 7 and 8; tech level Access to HE Diploma*	4
Entry to professional graduate employment	5	Professional Bachelor Professional Certificate	6	(IoT) HETAC DIT NQAI Advanced Certificate, Higher Certificate	4	certificate of higher education (CertHE) higher apprenticeship higher national certificate (HNC) level 4 award; level 4 certificate; level 4 diploma; level 4 NVQ	5
					5	diploma of higher education (DipHE) foundation degree higher national diploma (HND) level 5 award; level 5 certificate; level 5 diploma; level 5 NVQ	
Higher education and Advanced skills training	6	Higher Education Institutions (Colleges and Universities Bachelor Degree Bachelor of the Arts (BA) honours, Bachelor of Science (BSc) Former Teaching Degrees (Professor)	7	Universities (HEA) IoT (HETAC) DIT NQAI	6	degree apprenticeship degree with honours - for example bachelor of the arts (BA) honours, bachelor of science (BSc) honours graduate certificate graduate diploma level 6 award; level 6 certificate; level 6 diploma; level 6 NVQ; ordinary degree without honours	6
			8	Universities (HEA) IoT (HETAC) DIT NQAI Honours Bachelor			
Professional or postgraduate education, research or employment	7	Public and private Higher Education Institutions (Colleges and Universities Master Degrees Former Magistratura (Mag) Master of Arts (MA); Master of Science (MSc) Master of Business Administration (MBA) Former Engineering Degree (ENG) now Integrated Masters	9	Universities (HEA) IoT (HETAC) DIT NQAI Master's Degree, Postgraduate Diploma	7	integrated master's degree, for example master of engineering (MEng) level 7 award; level 7 certificate; level 7 diploma; level 7 NVQ; master's degree, master of arts (MA), master of science (MSc) postgraduate certificate postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) postgraduate diploma	7
	8	Public and Private Higher Education Institutions (Colleges and Universities Former Doctorate, PhD	10	Universities (HEA) IoT (HETAC) DIT NQAI Doctoral Degree, Higher Doctorate	8	Doctorate, for example doctor of philosophy (PhD or DPhil) level 8 award; level 8 certificate; level 8 diploma	8

[https://ec.europa.eu/plotus/en/compare?field\\_location\\_selection\\_tid%5B%5D=452&field\\_location\\_selection\\_tid%5B%5D=471](https://ec.europa.eu/plotus/en/compare?field_location_selection_tid%5B%5D=452&field_location_selection_tid%5B%5D=471)

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/legal-notice\\_en#copyright-notice](https://ec.europa.eu/info/legal-notice_en#copyright-notice)

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ.L:2011:330:0039:0042:EN:PDF>

<https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels>

Realisation of intended transformational goals and their consequent results are illustrated in five themes which represent the educational reform implementation efforts: 1) Curriculum reform as an agent of transformation; 2) Promotion of “European values” and Kosovo identity construction; 3) Transfer of international education standards; 4) Widening access to education and introducing quality assurance mechanisms; and 5) Study abroad scholarships as an agent for transformation.

### *Curriculum as an Agent of Transformation*

The reform led by UNMIK and its lead agencies<sup>31</sup> accompanied by foreign investment in both infrastructure and human capital, planned transformational changes through new legislation and changes in institutional and academic practices at all levels in education. At the pre-university level, legislation introduced plans consistent with a liberal education philosophy (Kuvendi i Kosovës, 2002) in which education develops “pupil’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential”. The 2003 Higher Education Law (Kuvendi i Kosovës, 2003) aimed to create autonomous higher education institutions in which members participate actively in the governance, management and quality assurance processes. Legislation addressed licensing and accreditation procedures for public and private education providers and established the Kosovo Accreditation Agency and the National Qualification Authority. Thus, the legislation aimed at creating profound changes in the education structure by widening educational offerings and democratising educational institutions, in which ownership, decision-making and accountability are shared among academic and management interests and responsibilities.

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<sup>31</sup>The agencies involved were: UNICEF for general curriculum development, psycho-social activities and early childhood; CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) for pre- and in-service teacher training, and FTP for assessment and evaluation financed by the World Bank, Helsinki Consulting Group for special needs education, and GTZ (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit) for vocational education, British Council and Austrian Cooperation Agency

The curriculum planning and implementation process instigated by the changes in institutions and laws depended on social, cultural and political circumstances. Lawton defines curriculum as “a selection from the culture of the society” (Lawton, 1975, p.7). Accordingly, it is argued here that knowledge, attitudes, values and other important aspects of social life are selected by decision makers to be transmitted to future generations. Therefore, the curriculum planning process depends on who is involved in the selection and what priorities are set.

At the pre-university level, the 2001 Kosovo Curriculum approved by UNMIK, intended to transform society through grass roots and civil society culture. The curriculum, prepared by UNICEF experts and organised by the Department of Education and Science (DES), stated that aims of the curriculum were to create a democratic society, which took into account education autonomy and individual and collective choices, providing civil education in a system that contains an organised civil society conglomerate:

“Is there such a thing as a democratic curriculum? No, there isn't. But a curriculum in a democracy is significantly different, and better, than its alternatives in dictatorships or authoritarian structures. Is a unified curriculum possible, and desired? Yes, but only within the limitations set by the autonomy of education in the micro-social universe of teacher-student interaction, and of the dialectics between the core and multiple options derived from individual and community rights and priorities. Homogeneity is not to be valued above all else. A society like the one in Kosovo cannot afford an unstructured curriculum landscape with a wild mixture of traditional, individual and collected leftovers. ...As Hannah Arendt postulates: "The rationale of politics is freedom". For the curriculum in the new Kosovo, this can be modified to read: “The rationale of our curriculum is civil education in a civil society”.

(Daxner, 2001, in Department for Education and Science 2001, p.4-5)

This curriculum promoted the formation of “basic scientific knowledge, communication, observation and analytical skills, creativity, autonomy, human rights and respect for the cultural identity, language and values of the communities, peace, tolerance, gender equality and environment“ (Kuvendi i Kosovës, 2002). Hence, this curriculum promoted a unified Kosovo identity, which could be realised in a democratic society.

A revised 2011 curriculum,<sup>32</sup> added the competency based approach and the market vocabulary highlighting the importance of human capital for Kosovo society:

“The curriculum framework aims at enabling Kosovar citizens to face the challenges of the twenty-first century and generate new competitive knowledge actively for the global labour market”....

...Competencies involve an integrated and coherent system of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are applicable and transferable. They enable students to cope with the challenges of the digital age and with the knowledge-based labour market in an interdependent world....

In compliance with the aims of education of Kosovo, the key competencies envisaged for the pre-university education system in Kosovo are: competency in communication and expression; competency in thinking; competency in learning; competency in life, work and environment-related areas; personal competency; and civic competency.

(Ministria Arsimit, Shkencës dhe Teknologjisë<sup>33</sup>, 2011, p.15-16)

Similarly, a market-oriented approach was adopted in higher education. These strategic changes argued that higher education programmes should correspond to market needs and concentrate on other transferable and technological skills required for students to survive, not only in the Kosovo market but also in the global market (MEST 2005, MEST, 2011).

“The goal of higher education is to put in place effective and sustainable inclusive education policies and legislation to support improved equitable access through developing a highly efficient and effective management of modern high quality higher education producing high calibre students at comparable European standards and to increase capacity for scientific research.”

(Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2011, p.125)

Despite these ‘high’ proclaimed aims, there is a wide consensus in Kosovo that education is facing an identity crisis. The working draft of Kosovo

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<sup>32</sup> Project funded by European Commission.

<sup>33</sup> ENG: Ministry of Education Science and Technology

Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021 recognises that the poor image is “reflected in public debate and negative media coverage about the quality of education” (MEST, 2016). While the need for engaging stakeholders in discussing how to overcome problems is recognised, policies continue to be shaped by the engagement of international stakeholders who assist the MEST to draft strategies, curriculum and support schools and continuous efforts of the political leaders to control education for their benefits, mainly through political appointments and nepotistic employment. On the other side, media and NGOs have been actively challenging and questioning these approaches and especially the role of universities and teachers, leading to several protests, publications and public opinion exposing the need for change (D4D, 2014; Gashi, 2014; Bektashi, 2015).

***Promoting “European Values” and Kosovo Identity Construction***

The branding of Kosovans as “Young Europeans” is based on the project of shaping an identity, which is European, Kosovan (different from Albania and from Serbia) and young to attract foreign investment (Hapqiu and Sparks, 2012, Fitzgerald, 2012). It is argued here that education does not live up to this ideal, because the young feel isolated and lack the proper educational and employment opportunities to engage.

Kosovo ideals for Europeanisation are mirrored in Education legislation and policies. For example, Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021 adopted the following vision (KESP, 2016):

Kosovo, a competitive knowledge society, based on European values with equal opportunities for all its citizens to contribute to sustainable economic and social development.

(KESP, 2016, p.42)

However, without explicating what European values mean, the same document highlights the challenge to ensure school autonomy and professional management (KESP, 2016). Although education laws endorse European standards such as, European Qualification Structure, Lisbon

Convention, Bologna Process, European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), Quality Assurance Standards,<sup>34</sup> education institutions continue to implement superficial changes that affect only the duration and the structure of the awards with limited student exchange or mobility.

Failure in the implementation was also a result of tendencies to establish control over educational institutions and influence identity representation. For example, UNMIK, attempting to promote a new Kosovo identity with a “multi-ethnic” composition, exercised significant control on very important themes, such as history, culture and indigenous matters (Sommers and Buckland, 2004). Similarly, after independence, Kosovo authorities promoted specific aspects of Kosovo history that the media reported as distortion of data and misrepresentation of events, including hate speech, in text books (Aliu, 2012). Similar to the previous periods, the hidden curriculum at educational institutions persisted by promoting Albanianism and recent war heroes and history. Thus, proclaimed educational goals were compromised by the political control over the curriculum, identity-construction efforts and hidden curriculum.

### ***Transfer of International Education Standards***

As many reforms were transferred from western countries, changing academic traditions according to Walker and Epp(2010)required changing the very essence of what education is about. Many reports evidenced limited participatory teaching and learning approaches, with auditory learning styles and rote learning practices being mainly promoted instead (Gowing and Saqipi, 2010, Sommers and Buckland, 2004, Weinstein et al., 2007, Nuredini, 2010, Alo, 2010, Walker and Epp, 2010). New methodologies aiming at student centred teaching concentrated on encouraging student participation in the learning process, project or group work, and searching and presenting information using technology. However, training of teachers

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<sup>34</sup>Project funded by the European Commission

was too general and produced poor results in bringing about desired change and innovation.

Reforms also changed assessment practices, which aimed to move from an oral examination tradition to written examinations, as well as implementation of quality standards through external examinations at the national level. Reforms introduced testing from the first grade, a variety of assessment strategies in higher education and state examinations for regulated professions. Testing and selection through testing, which became a distinctive characteristic of Kosovo education, failed to achieve the desired liberal education outcomes promoted by the curriculum.

Although investment in education increased over time, it still represents around 4.1% of GDP, which according to World Bank, is less than the average in Europe and Central Asia at 4.6% and less than upper middle income country average at 5% (World Bank, 2015; KESP, 2016)<sup>35</sup>. The educational goals are hindered by the limited and poor quality of resources and research. A review of primary school text books (grades 6-9) found scientific inaccuracies, overload, lack of critical thinking stimulation and lack of modern methods and approaches (Thaqi, 2013, BIRN, 2010). Similarly, an assessment report on library use revealed that only 15% of university students and staff subscribed in the national and university library or used electronic resources available to them in the English language (Rama, 2011). In addition, only a few foreign authors are accessible in the Albanian language and research possibilities are limited, resulting in less than one publication in international journals by academic staff members (OSCE, 2008, p. 10, Center for Political Courage, 2012). Thus, access to current literature and participation in research are among the main challenges for the implementation of reforms.

Changes in laws, curriculum and organisation do not automatically translate into transformation of academic traditions. While it is recognised that in large scale reforms, the process from the time of initiation to

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<sup>35</sup>Spending in Education in the neighbouring countries according to KESP (2016): Albania (3.3%), Macedonia (3.5%), Croatia (4.4%) and Serbia (4.7%)

institutionalisation may last from 5 to 10 years (Anchan et al., 2003), changes in Kosovo depended mainly on the level of ownership among educational institutions and teachers, resistance of different actors and other contextual factors, such as political climate and culture. Lack of ownership, in combination with the struggle for political control of education institutions, resulted in the mismatch of education practices and education philosophy and the use of hidden curriculum.

A “hidden curriculum” as defined by Snyder (1971) emerged in which practices (management practices, teaching materials, teaching methods and assessment) were only minimally aligned with declared educational goals. Transforming institutions represents different threats to stakeholders and requires genuine changes in values, beliefs and practices underpinning academic traditions (Walker and Epp, 2010). As Bache and Taylor (2003), involved in the establishment of a new political science Faculty at the University of Prishtina, reveal:

"Control over the University of Prishtina was identified as an important political resource in a highly politicised society that featured ten years of self-organisation in HE. In resisting changes that would undermine local control over education, local actors employed resistance strategies honed by the experience of authoritarianism and subordination. These strategies were low-level, subtle and often disguised as cooperation through the use of ‘hidden transcripts’. In the terms of the policy diffusion literature, there was adaptation on a conceptual level to demonstrate an attitude corresponding to dominant ideas, but no indication that this adaptation would affect practice in the near future."

(Bache and Taylor, 2003, p. 289)

Lack of ownership in the reform process by the local management created resistance tactics that supported superficial implementation while focusing on gaining control of the educational institutions. Changes in the system go hand in hand with organisational culture and management practices that promote the liberal philosophy. For example, Gowing and Saqipi(2010) in assessing capacity needs at the municipal education directorates (MED) found that the main management deficiencies were caused by political appointment of managers and staff and overlapping

responsibilities between institutions in pursuit of control over the schools. Similarly, several reports on higher education highlighted political intervention in the election of rectors, deans and academic staff at the public university (Walker and Epp, 2010, Breca and Anderson, 2010). Political intervention along with nepotism in employment practices both in public and private institutions were identified as the main obstacles in regulating the governance of education institutions in line with the reform aims. Thus, the political climate and culture has undermined autonomy and academic freedom and has compromised the reform intentions for students' individual development and wider social changes.

***Widening Access to Education and Introducing Quality Assurance Mechanisms***

In many reports, the shortcomings of the education system are blamed for high youth unemployment rates (The World Bank and Statistical Office of Kosovo, 2007, The World Bank, 2007, The World Bank, 2008, UNDP, 2006). Kosovan political elites pressured by the large numbers of secondary school graduates managed unemployment through a higher education strategy that engaged the young population longer in education reaching a 62,7 participation rate for students aged between 20-24 (Rexhaj and Pupovci, 2015). By 2013, thirty-five private education providers and six new public universities were accredited through a process of quality assurance meandering. As Bristow's report contends:

“ Yet compromises have been made. It is apparent from the External Panels' reports that some accredited institutions have barely reached the threshold of international comparability in research, scholarship, pedagogy or resources. Some of these deficiencies have been “nodded through” in the hope and expectation of future improvement. “

(Bristow, 2010, p 3-4)

Again, a quick fix strategy did not ensure conditions for a meaningful education experience and employment. Given these circumstances, policies for increasing participation in higher education and

political pressures in the accreditation process, have impaired quality assurance processes as well as the education experience. Political control over the education institutions empowered political elites through nepotistic employment and promotion, thus contributing to devaluing of education. Although it proclaimed international standards, the Quality Assurance Processes followed instead a meandering approach, which risked the ideals for transformation.

Superficial implementation of reforms and lack of ownership ignored real problems and challenges in the Kosovan education system. Research and media reports contended that curriculum overload, school mismanagement and ineffective assessment procedures were key factors contributing to the poor performance of Kosovo schools and devaluation of ethics in education (Klinaku, 2011, Koha, 2012, Mehmeti, 2011, Devetaku and Mehmeti, 2010). For example, when referring to assessment, the IOE report (Peffer et al., 2005) contended that “national standards may not yet have been established with sufficient precision and that internal assessment is not monitored” (Peffer et al., 2005, p.12). Another research study carried out by the Kosovo Institute of Pedagogy (Devetaku and Mehmeti, 2010), in 30 schools involving 600 teachers, 600 students and 150 parents of grades 7-13 contends:

“There is a crisis in the internal evaluation process in Kosovo Schools”, as a result of students' low interest for learning and of low quality of teacher's work, poor knowledge of basic evaluation criteria, unjust pressure of peers to enhance grades without merit, pressure from school directors who want higher percentage of students passing to justify "improvement" of school performance, retaining the staff, answering the parent pressure on student grades, over population of classes and lack of quality management in schools."

(Devetaku and Mehmeti, 2010, p. 103)

The report highlighted the lack of communication between parents and schools, teaching and learning overload, negative behaviour, low grades and the impossibility of improving them (Devetaku et al., 2010, p. 29). This

suggests other mismanagement problems, rather than pupil deficiencies or teacher deficiencies, such as school and parent relationships and school, MED and MEST relationships. In addition to school management and internal evaluation system problems, external examination results indicated poor performance and regressive outcomes in the learning culture (MEST, 2013). Anecdotal evidence, media reports and recently, a Ministry of Education and Science Strategy document suggest serious deficiencies in the invigilation of external examination system that promotes cheating (Shqiptar, 2011, Ahmeti, 2008, Klinaku, 2011, Kosova Sot, 2011, KESP, 2016). In general, it is argued that school performance should be investigated not only based on test results, but also on school effectiveness and other factors that influence learning culture.

In higher education, increased student access did not correspond with institutional resources and effectiveness. This mismatch contributed to regressive outcomes in academic practices, research and student performance. Higher education institutions justified the low completion and employment rates of graduates with the quality of high school graduates, weak regulations for full and part time attendance, re-sit procedures and study duration (Bristow, 2010). Students and civil society organisations reported continuous dissatisfaction with institutional performance and accountability (Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development, 2007, Thaqi, 2009). Reports on corrupt admission, assessment, staff tenure and management practices at the public university have continuously generated protests, management resignation and a general debate on what is said to be a crisis in Kosovo education. The main reason for this crisis was the failure of Universities, MEST, KAA and other authorities to observe the laws regulating governance, employment and quality assurance. It is argued that educational institutions, in particular the main Public University in Prishtina, needed a progressive transformation where the key players would be the teaching staff and students (Tahiri, 2010, King and Baxter Magolda, 2003).

### ***Study Abroad Scholarships as Agents for Transformation***

Anchan, et al(2003) suggest that any large scale reform must be accompanied by changes in the human resources of the institutions. Similarly, Goddard and Anderson (2010), reflecting on educational reform in Kosovo, argue that cultural change begins with changing attitudes in individuals. Moreover, it is suggested that changes in Kosovo society are possible only if human capital is developed. From an investment point of view, this strategy has been pursued since 2001 by several agencies that awarded scholarships for Masters and PhD studies at international universities. The scholarship schemes aimed to facilitate change in Kosovan society through change of agents who would have the opportunity to act and become empowered upon their return (EU, Ron Brown, KAEF, KEDP, OSI, Chevening, etc.).<sup>36</sup> In this way, education funding allocated for scholarships for graduate studies would bring immediate returns when Kosovo graduate returnees introduced change and innovation in their workplaces, such as universities, government institutions and other sectors.

The majority of study abroad scholarships offered in Kosovo are in the area of human and behavioural sciences with the biggest percentage in economics, European integration and law, thus representing programmes aimed at addressing major Kosovo challenges such as economic development, social and political transformation, and rule of law. The destinations of students were determined by the scholarship offers, led by the United Kingdom until 2013 and followed by the USA. The British Council Chevening Scholarships and the Open Society Institute/Staffordshire University Scholarships are two main schemes for studying in the UK. The European Commission's "The Young Cell Scheme," operating since 2003, also placed the UK as a main destination. Five other important scholarship schemes were provided in Kosovo by American Education Fund, American Embassy Ron Brown Scholarships, German DAAD scholarships, Kosovo Education Programme (KEDP) and Austrian Kosovo

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<sup>36</sup>European Commission Civil Service Scholarships, Kosovo American Education Fund, Ron Brown, Kosovo Educator Development Program, Open Society Institute Scholarships and British Council Chevening Scholarships are the main scholarship schemes operating in Kosovo that are contributing to the development of human capital.

Cooperation Programme scholarships. Additionally, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology coordinated other donor and privately funded scholarships. Other minor scholarship schemes were offered directly through the Public University of Prishtina. Between 2000 and 2012, approximately 300 Kosovo student beneficiaries studied abroad through these schemes and returned to Kosovo, out of which, 170 studied in the UK.

All scholarships intend to contribute to the creation of future leaders and to the improvement of the human capital and overall institutional performance. For example the Chevening scholarships “are awarded to talented individuals who demonstrate the potential to become future leaders, decision-makers and opinion formers,” and “who will demonstrate that they will use studies and experience in UK to benefit themselves, their country and the UK”(The Chevening Scholarship, 2013, no page)<sup>37</sup>. The experience of studying in the UK is described as “A living dream. Challenging. Life changing. Perfect. Meaningful. Transformational“(Chevening, 2016, no page)<sup>38</sup>. Similarly, the Staffordshire and OSI scholarship scheme aimed to “assist 'capacity building' in the region by speeding up the training of professional economists needed in the process of transition to a democratic market economy” ( Staffordshire University and OSI Scholarship Scheme, 2013,p.1). This scheme gave preference to candidates “working in universities, higher schools, research institutions and the public sector and those who were likely to make a significant contribution to the economic development of their country” (Staffordshire University and OSI Scholarship Scheme, 2013,p.1). In addition to these specific UK schemes, The Young Cell Scheme, aimed “to contribute to the creation of an effective, efficient and transparent public administration in Kosovo at all levels” (Young Cell Scheme, 2013,no page).This scheme therefore expected that the returnees would improve the performance of institutions and “help

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<sup>37</sup> webpage

<sup>38</sup> Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/officialchevening/videos/1295841050428921/>

Kosovo Government to meet the obligations arising from the EU Integration Process”(Young Cell Scheme, 2013, no page<sup>39</sup>).

Kosovo’s government, scholarship providers, students and institutions have acknowledged the contribution of these scholarship schemes. The literature suggests a substantial level of integration of beneficiaries in the job market and public institutions (Cipuseva et al., 2013, UNDP, 2006). In 2012, another major scholarship scheme, in the amount of \$20,000,000, was set up by the Kosovo Government and the US government, titled Transformational Leadership Scholarships. In the inauguration of this scholarship scheme, the American ambassador stated:

“During the time of my service here in Kosovo, one of the striking characteristics is what a difference young Kosovars are making within their institutions of government, within the private sector throughout the country, when they’ve been educated in America and had the experience of higher education in the United States. They do come back transformed. And that’s what we would like to try and do with these funds on a systemic basis. To train an entire generation of potential leaders at American institutions of higher education. The number could be as many as 800, it really depends on how much cooperation and additional funding is provided by the American institutions themselves. And there is hope that we will in fact get to those higher numbers.

I believe that if this is successful, this is going to have a genuinely transformational effect on Kosovo, for generations to come.”

(American Ambassador in Kosovo, Christofer Dell, 2012)

The stated intentions of scholarship schemes refer to individual changes that would influence future institutions from which Kosovo society would benefit. Their intentions also confirm the problems in Kosovo’s education system and institutional governance. Their expectations, therefore, are that study abroad will have transformational effects upon the beneficiaries who would contribute to institutional and societal change in

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<sup>39</sup> Web page

Kosovo through their professional practice. This research seeks to explore the extent to which this transformation is evident in selected participants.

## Conclusions

This chapter argued that the education of Kosovo Albanians is influenced by historical, political and social circumstances of continuous turmoil and change. In these circumstances, identification through language, customs, religion and nationality has created a complex relationship between the people and the education system in different phases of Kosovo's history. The historical analysis illustrates the role education can play for societies in changing contexts. In Kosovo, education was a form of resistance against external threats to society and was perceived as a tool for change. In addition, education served as a survival mechanism in the efforts to oppose domination and dehumanisation during periods of violence and war. Education was used to induce peace and reconciliation. Education, it is argued here, historically has played an important role by inducing individual and social change.

The analysis reinforces the argument that education has a dialogic dimension where conflict and negotiation occurs between social actors. For example, through parallel education in the 1990s and peaceful resistance against Serbian rule, Kosovo Albanians resisted identity threat (Castells, 2011, Kostovicova, 2005). The same can be argued for Kosovo Serbs who after 2000, reinforced resistance against Kosovo institutions and Kosovan identity through de-facto separation of location and curricula (Weinstein et al., 2007, p. 44, Davies, 2013). For Kosovo Albanians after the war of 1998-1999, several factors conspired to create weak and over-politicised institutions in the struggle for control of education. These included impositions by the international community and the superficial implementation of structural and curricular reforms at all levels of education, which resulted in negative outcomes and status quo maintenance. Having operated in conflict and struggling circumstances, a culture of

resistance had been developed and maintained that inhibited learning culture transformations.

The analysis suggests that without proper planning and implementation in line with social, economic and human resources factors, education strategies and laws can negatively affect educational practices. For example, the human capital approach and the rhetoric for a democratic and inclusive society did not match the government investment in education or the quality. Moreover, policies that presented education as a merit based road to success, employment, social mobility and overall economic growth were contradicted by practices that demoted equality and distribution of life opportunities, in terms of jobs, positions of power, influence and decision-making. Consequently, despite challenges related to quality, education credentials became important not only for wealth created through occupying a job, but also for status and power. Therefore, to achieve desired changes in the development of human capital, study abroad scholarship schemes are used as a development strategy to facilitate quick fix changes in Kosovan society through individual change.

This chapter has explained a wider context of Kosovo's educational landscape, which helps the understanding of the context from which the research participants come. This understanding facilitates the exploration of the effects of study-abroad experiences in the transformation and integration of research participants that follows in the next chapters. Therefore, understanding the Kosovo context from which research participants come before embarking on the study abroad experience will help facilitate further exploration of individual transformation and integration, by addressing who or what is transformed, in what circumstances and what are the catalysts and barriers for transformation.

## **CHAPTER 3: TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AND STUDY ABROAD**

Study abroad outcomes have been widely investigated through cultural, intercultural and developmental theoretical frameworks. However, recent research has shown interest in its transformative dimension (Savicki, 2008) as there is scholarly consensus that study abroad experience has a profound impact on the lives of students, and is often labelled “life changing” or “transformative” (Hunter, 2008, p. 93, Selby, 2008, p. 1). Importantly, transformative learning theory has been widely used as a theoretical framework through which cross-cultural experiences are studied (Taylor and Snyder, 2011). Underpinned by the existing literature, this research uses Transformative Learning theory as a useful lens to investigate the transformative learning dimensions of study abroad experience.

Jack Mezirow, the originator of Transformative Learning theory, who was largely influenced by Freire(1970), Habermas(1984), and Gould (1978;1989),defined transformative learning as "learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open and emotionally able to change" (Mezirow, 2009, p. 22). He argued that personal transformation involves changing frames of reference through critical reflection in 10 identified phases:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-Examination with feelings of guilt and shame
3. A critical assessment of epistemic, socio-cultural or psychic assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared, and that others have negotiated a similar change
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning of a course of action
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships

10. Reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective

(Mezirow, 1991, p. 168-169)

While the first two phases deal with crisis response, phases three, four and five involve critical reflection, which is crucial for change. Mezirow's process of transformation presupposes that disorientation is negative experience leading to self-examination and identity threat. Faced with identity threat, learners either engage in self-deception activities or uncover distortions through critical assessment of their assumptions. If learners uncover distortions, they recognise they are not the only ones who have been affected by these distortions and engage in planning, exploring acquiring knowledge and skills, trying and reinforcing new perspectives and roles (Phases 4, five, six, seven, eight and nine). Finally, phase ten describes a re-integration phase, which assumes a separation from old selves to new selves, or towards transformation.

Mezirow's frame of reference is described as an interconnected system of meaning perspectives formed through socialisation and influenced by culture, language and biography to shape the structure and processes with which engagement with new experience is managed (Mezirow, 1991, Mezirow, 2000). Meaning schemes and meaning perspectives are referred to by Mezirow (1991.p.4-5) as "boundary structures for perceiving and comprehending new data". Frame of reference is used interchangeably with the terms "meaning perspectives" and "habits of mind", denoting a mind-set or worldview of orienting assumptions and expectations involving values, beliefs and concepts with socio-linguistic, moral-ethical, epistemic, philosophical, psychological, and aesthetic dimensions" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 17).

Although meaning perspectives are classified in categories, their boundary structure implies influence on each other as well as on the whole frame. For example, our socio-linguistic perspectives, which include economic, ecological, educational, linguistic, religious, and political

aspects, shape the way we think about and act in family, community or other institutions (such as schools, work and religious institutions). Or, similarly, psychological perspectives, referring to our personality, self-concept, needs, roles and relationships with significant others and other social actors in different social settings, influence our epistemic perspectives, cognitive abilities, learning style and other ways we reason, reflect and judge. In other words, a frame of reference is the sum total of different meaning perspectives, which shape the structure and processes in which we engage with new experiences (Mezirow, 1991). As a result, any redefinition of meaning perspective involves a negotiation with the interconnected framework system.

The process of interaction with external influences highlights the fact that the frames of reference can be shared, distorted and changed. For example, roles such as woman, learner, parent, partner and worker are understood and performed in communities or in specific social situations based on the shared frame of reference. Frames of reference can be distorted by authority and power, as in cases where religious or governing authorities apply censorship, ideological inculcation, interpretation of historical events, and personality cults. They also can be a result of psychological distortions, as in the example of abuse or marginalisation. As frames of reference are products of socialisation, they are internalised, and may be subject to reassessment when an individual or a group finds them dysfunctional. Changing frames of reference affects relationships and institutional or community practices. This implies that redefinition of a frame of reference is always done in the context of location, culture, community and social situations.

Mezirow argues that critical reflection in assessing content, process and premise of assumptions in which we pose problems and take actions determines the reframing and the action process (Mezirow, 1998). He emphasises that the level of transformation depends on the type of reflection (content, process or premise). He defines content reflection as engagement with the content of the task, perspective or action. In process reflection, one

engages with procedures, steps and their results. In both content and process reflection, learners may change one or more meaning schemes. In premise reflection, learners reflect on the grounds upon which a combination of meaning schemes is based. As meaning schemes have relational dimensions, premise reflection may change frame of reference (habits of mind) and resulting points of view.

Accordingly, Kitchenam(2008, p. 118) argues that one can try out different points of view, learn with present meaning schemes and learn new meaning schemes, however, one cannot try out or adopt habits of mind without profound transformation. This is because transformative learning implies redefinition of frames of reference taking into consideration the larger view.

In relation to learner identity, Illeris(2013) and Jarvis(2011) argue that Mezirow's definition is limited only to meaning perspectives and does not cover other factors, such as intuitive, emotional and regressive dimensions of transformative learning. Their definition of transformative learning extends Mezirow's definition to learning that changes the identity of the learner.

“Learning is both formative and transformative: it can occur in the cognitive, emotive and action domains; it can be rational, intuitive, extra –rational or even irrational. It is part of the process of life itself, the outcome of which is a living person-you and I being continually transformed either pro-actively or reactively through learning.”

*(Jarvis, 2011, p. 26)*

“The concept of transformative learning comprises all learning that implies change in the identity of the learner”

*(Illeris, 2013, p. loc 1074)*

Defining learning as a process of becoming recognises the interaction between external influences and individual agency as “meaning making”, which involves content, knowledge, understanding and skills

shaping the learner functionality, incentives, motivation, emotions, volition shaping the learner sensitivity, and interaction with environment, referring to actions, communication and cooperation that enable social integration (Illeris, 2007,p.29). According to Illeris (2007), learning is the core dimension of the identity that enables “coherent development of meaning, functionality, sensitivity and sociality” involving interaction between the individual and the social environment (Illeris, 2007,p.139).

In relation to identity, according to Jenkins (2008, p. 17), interaction dynamics make identity a “process of identification in the human world containing individual order, interactional order and institutional order, through comparison of similarity and difference” in time and space. Jenkins further argues that identity is “neither totally fixed nor totally fluid” but the process of becoming in context and in interaction. Jenkin’s (2008) concept, although it does not draw from learning theories, concurs with the concept of ‘community of practices’ in which shared histories of learning are conceptualised as an interaction of individual and society over time (Wenger, 1999,p.86):

“Practices evolve as shared histories of learning. History in this sense is neither merely a personal or collective experience nor just a set of enduring artefacts and institutions, but a combination of participation and reification intertwined over time”

(Wenger, 1999, p. 87)

The process of interaction in these definitions of identity and learning, imply that although identity undergoes changes, changes are problematic, as they require integration of prior and new experiences within and across communities of practice or contexts.

In the context of study abroad experience, it is suggested that cultural differences between home and host country trigger a crisis, which innately provokes adjustment, self-exploration and crossing of various existing personal, cultural and professional boundaries. This research aims to explore the identity work at these boundaries.

Conceptualising the term boundary as referring to “socio- cultural difference leading to discontinuity in action or interaction” (Akkerman and Bakker, 2011, p. 133), a study abroad experience involves not only crossing geographical boundaries but also overcoming differences and establishing continuity across two cultures. Oberg (1960) and Guklahom and Gullahorn (1963) argue that this adjustment goes back and forth between entry into a foreign country and re-entry to the home country, causing a so called “culture shock” and a “reverse culture shock,” respectively (Oberg, 2006, Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963, Gaw, 2000). Both terms refer to a crisis that students undergo as a result of engaging with difference and with personal growth experiences. The resulting tension provides a space in which students may engage with and compare different perspectives, and which in turn may lead to significant learning and boundary crossing across different dimensions of their lives.

This chapter discusses and critiques the theoretical debate on transformative learning in general and reviews specific research studies that explore transformative learning in cross-cultural contexts. In the first section, two main theoretical orientations, the individual and social perspective, will be discussed in detail. Although individual and social perspectives each have a distinct focus, this research considers the individual interaction with the social world as an inseparable identification process, and therefore proposes an integrative lens to explore the processes and outcomes of transformative learning resulting from study abroad experience. In the second section, the review will concentrate on studies investigating transformative learning in study abroad contexts to delineate processes and outcomes resulting from the tensions experienced. Finally, the chapter identifies several gaps and further questions raised in the literature, which are incorporated in the research design and data analysis.

### **Transformative Learning Theory: Main Theoretical Orientations**

Transformative Learning theory has generated significant interest among many scholars and practitioners (Kitchenham, 2008). The literature suggests the existence of two prevailing transformative learning theory traditions in North America and Europe (Kokkos and Koulaouzides, 2011, Kokkos, 2014) and two main theoretical perspectives, the individual and social perspective (Taylor and Snyder, 2011).

Besides Mezirow, the most influential scholars who have shaped the understanding of transformative learning in North America include Boyd, Brookfield, Cranton, Dirkx, Kasl, Kegan, King, Meyers, O'Sullivan, Taylor, Tisdell<sup>40</sup> (Taylor, 1998, Taylor, 2009, Taylor, 2008, Kokkos and Koulaouzides, 2011, Taylor and Snyder, 2011, Taylor and Laros, 2014, Taylor and Cranton, 2013, Taylor, 2007, Taylor, 2000, Snyder, 2008, Kitchenham, 2008). North American scholars, although tackling the social approach, take a practice-based approach and focus on transformations at the individual level. European scholars mostly take a stronger theoretical orientation and focus on the social and emancipatory dimensions (Kokkos and Koulaouzides, 2011). In addition, Kokkos and Koulaouzides (2011) indicate that besides Mezirow and his North American colleagues, the most frequently cited authors in European literature include Freire, Adorno, Apps, Bakhtin, Bourdieu, Foucault, Gagne, Giro, Heron, Horkheimer, Illeris, Jarvis, McLaren and others who investigate the social dimension of transformative learning. Focusing on transformative learning as a learning theory, Illeris (2011) identified nine theories of transformative learning by European Scholars including Freud, Vytkovsky, Piaget, Rogers, Erikson, Baetson, Engerstrom and Alheit who refer to transformative learning as a significant and deeper level of learning, capable of changing not only knowledge, values and skills, but also conceptions, understandings, attitudes and the whole person (Illeris, 2011). This suggests a difference in how transformative learning is approached by different research communities.

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<sup>40</sup> Authors are written in alphabetical order.

The debate centres on the following questions:

- What kind of learning is transformative learning?
- What are the outcomes of transformative learning?
- What are the roles of learners, of relationships and of context in fostering and integrating transformative learning?

Both the individual and the social perspectives view transformative learning as learning that deconstructs long-held beliefs, roles and ways of knowing, doing and being, resulting in a transformed self, both as an individual and as part of a social context. However, in contrast to the individual approach, which concentrates on transforming and integrating the self through discourse or authentic expression, the social approach concentrates on transforming the individual's relationships with social structures by changing them both.

The earliest critique of the theory challenged the limited attention given to issues of context, power and relationships (Clark and Wilson, 1991, Inglis, 1998, Collard and Law, 1989, Wilson, 1999, Cervero and Wilson, 2001) and the overemphasis on the rational nature of critical reflection (Dirkx, 1998). Later critiques suggest that transformative learning has become a popular assignation to all kinds of learning and changes, lacking the necessary scientific rigor to explain the process and outcomes of transformative learning (Kegan, 2000, Brookfield, 2000, Taylor and Cranton, 2013, Taylor and Laros, 2014, Kucukaydin and Cranton, 2013, Newman, 2010). The continuous development of the theory has generated different conceptualisations. These have resulted in fragmentation within the individual perspective in the rational and the extra rational strand and in fragmentation between individual and social perspectives. This fragmentation has raised awareness on contested issues that could not be bridged and initiated efforts for more integrative approaches to the transformative learning research (Taylor and Snyder, 2011, Taylor and Cranton, 2013).



***The Individual Perspective***

The individual perspective has evolved in the rational and extra-rational strand concentrating the debate on the role of critical reflection, emotions and actions in the transformative learning processes and outcomes. Dirkx's reflection on the 6<sup>th</sup> International Transformative Learning Conference illustrates the fragmentation.

"I felt our fervor and passion seemed to swamp our capacity to reason and at times, reason threatened to send our souls into hiding"

(Dirkx cited in Cranton et al., 2006, p. 145)

The rational perspective argues that transformative learning transforms frames of reference, mainly referring to personal epistemology through a rational and intentional process within awareness. The extra rational perspective claims that transformative learning transforms the person through a process of inner dialogue between the sub-consciousness and the outer world. I argue that these two perspectives may be integrated because both analytical and non-analytical processes may be involved in assessing and changing ways of knowing, being, doing and interacting. This research specifically tries to analyse the nature of disorientation and the questioning process to better understand transformative learning processes.

***The Rational Perspective***

The rational perspective sees transformative learning as a staged process that transforms meaning perspectives through higher-level critical reflection and purposeful action (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow somewhat agrees that learning outside of awareness can be accessed and brought to awareness through extra-rational modes of learning (Mezirow, J. 2006 in Dirkx et al., 2006). However, he argues that transformative learning involves a rational process within awareness. The rational strand links stages of development with learners' age, prior education experiences, educational level and conditions of dialogue (King and Kitchener, 2010, Kitchenham, 2008, Kegan, 2000, Mezirow, 1991). Brock (2010) suggests that there may be a repetition of phases or omission of certain phases, depending on the learner's cognitive abilities, readiness to learn and

validation of new learning through dialogue. Although recognising psychological, epistemic, socio-cultural aspects, the rational approach ascertains that the development of critical reflection of assumptions demands adult reasoning (King and Kitchener, 2010). Therefore, according to the rational perspective, transformative learning depends on the ability to critically reflect and reason.

The rational perspective suggests that perspective change undergoes a validation process involving internal and external conditions. Learners who experience transformative learning gain the ability to question internalised assumptions and taken for granted influences and thereby increase the ability to critically reflect and engage in discourse. As a result, they are more open and able to change (Mezirow, 1991). According to Mezirow (2009), the ability to critically reflect is not a sufficient condition to validate meaning. Other conditions where learners are objective, fully informed, free from any kind of coercion, open to other alternatives, and equal participants in dialogue are necessary (Mezirow, 2003). Frames of reference change through the transformation of previous knowledge, values or attitudes (Davis, 2011) involving a process of dialogue and validation that affects perception, meaning making and actions.

Recognising the positionality of all actors, including that of educators, Mezirow's rational perspective suggests that once learners experience perspective transformation, they decide the degree, form and time of their individual agency and resistance depending on the level of risk and power relations. This infers that transformation is restricted within the individual, whereas societal changes can only be influenced indirectly by individual transformations (Mezirow, 1991, p. 208):

“Adult learning transforms meaning perspectives, not society. The aspect of transformative learning that relates most closely to education for social action is action resulting from transformations in sociolinguistic meaning perspectives. Such action ultimately can change society, but whether or not perspective transformation results in specific collective actions depends upon a number of situational, psychological, and knowledge variables”

(Mezirow, 1991, p. 208)

The role of learner in this process is to engage actively and consciously in critical reflection and self-development. The role of educators is to challenge assumptions, encourage diverse points of view and provide a safe space for discourse, while not forcing their point of view or fostering political goals. The role of significant others is to support perspective transformation by recognising and understanding the need of learners to change. Therefore, the rational approach suggests that perspective transformation is dependent on cognitive abilities and context and thus, highly rational.

### *The Extra Rational Perspective*

The extra rational perspective suggests that the outcome of transformative learning is identity change, which occurs through the two main processes of individuation and authenticity. Proponents of the extra rational strand, unlike the rational approach, argue that transformative learning does not happen only in the head (Illeris, 2011, Jarvis, 2011), but holistically involving all senses and other ways of knowing (Belenky and Stanton, 2000, Dirkx, 2006). Boyd and Myers' (1988) drawing from Jung's depth psychology, explain the process of meaning making as dialogue with the individual's psychic structures and their elements (Jung, 1921/1972, p. 448 cited in Cranton and Roy, 2003, p. 90) defined individuation as:

“the process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated; in particular, it is the development of the psychological individual as a being distinct from the general, collective psychology. Individuation, therefore, is a process of differentiation, having for its goal the development of the individual personality”

(Jung, 1921/1972, p. 448 cited in Cranton and Roy, 2003, p. 90)

Drawing from the Jungian concept of individuation, Dirkx (2006) suggests that transformative learning is a process that is activated by a disorienting situation, involving identity negotiation through the dialogue between the

conscious and unconscious. He describes identity as consisting of an ‘inner community’ which negotiates meaning between it and the social environment (Dirkx, 2006, Dirkx et al., 2006, p. 126). Emotions in this process, as explained by Dirkx, play an important role, representing “voices or images that emerge within consciousness”(Dirkx, 2001, p. 65). Dirkx (2006, p. 18) asserts that emotions, feelings, and imagination mediate the process of individuation and that in contrast to the very rational process described by Mezirow, imaginal methods using journal writing, literature, poetry, art, movies, story-telling, dance, and ritual can offer powerful and meaningful experiences of transformative potential. The main emphasis in this perspective is the recognition of emotional charges resulting from traumatic experiences, relationships or extra rational methods engaging with everyday experiences and different learning preferences in the affective domain (Dirkx et al., 2006).

Besides individuation, Kucukaydin and Cranton (2013) argue that transformative learning involves authentic expression. While individuation is the differentiation of self from others through a conscious expression of one’s own position in the collective, authenticity is the “expression of genuine self in the community” (Kucukaydin and Cranton, 2013, p. 93). However, individuation and authenticity are not necessarily rational processes. When people act, they are very often lead by feelings and intuition. When faced with social and cultural barriers, they either act irrationally (not thinking about the consequences of the actions), intentionally (opposing power structures knowing the consequences, but deciding to act to pursue their goals) or intuitively (on the basis of the inner content of the psyche)(Jarvis, 2011). Development of authentic relationships requires that learners let loose from the usual, rational and controlled self and express emotions, feelings and the inner self. A supportive teaching environment with care, trust and confidence engages learners’ whole being through different ways, including music, pictures, dance, movement, and problem posing (Cranton and Wright, 2008, Tisdell, 2000, Cranton and King, 2003). In all occasions, affective and psychological aspects interplay with contextual factors that facilitate or impede action.

*The Social Perspective*

The social perspective views transformational learning as learning that raises consciousness “conscientizatio” (Freire, 1970, p. 19) referring to “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions—developing a critical awareness—so that individuals can take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 1970, p. 19). This concept resembles that of Green (2005) when referring to “wide awakesness” as the capacity to understand what is happening in the world and to make alternative choices in handling situations. Therefore, how we learn and how we approach life situations often depends on the awareness and control we have upon oppressive social, political and economic elements (Freire, 1970, Inglis, 1997b). In contrast to the individual perspective, the social perspective views transformative learning from a critical theory and collectivist approach (Brookfield, 2001, Apple, 2013). The social perspective suggests that individuals need to adopt a group approach to address issues of inequality, injustice and oppression (Scott, 2003, Brookfield, 2003, Freire, 1970, Apple, 2013, Brookfield, 2001). The social perspective suggests that the outcome of transformative learning is activism, or praxis (Freire, 1970). By active participation in the community, individuals develop the ability to organise in social groups, to name their reality and to address power structures threatening their quality of life, in other words, their praxis (O’Sullivan et al., 2002).

This perspective raises the concern that even in so-called democratic societies; agency is limited by invisible forms of power, such as surveying, self-control activities and different forms of capital (Inglis, 1997a). However, although this perspective recognises the effects of group distortions, it suggests that “the awakened person” can distinguish the demands of the society and can thus act authentically (Green, 2005). This activism counters the rational approach in transformative learning, which by rationalising the conditions upon which one can act, only disciplines,

deskills and accommodates people in their social and cultural realities (Inglis, 1998, Collard and Law, 1989, Brookfield, 2001).

Although this perspective has the label *social*, it in fact values individual talents and capacities and the role of imagination and arts as alternative ways of being in the midst of “deterministic” and “limit situations”(Greene, 1994). As Green contends:

“Imagination allows us to devise alternative modes of being, alternative projects and solutions. It is what enables us to look beyond the "given" in our own experience, to envisage what might be if things were otherwise. It is what enables us to summon the needs of strangers and to attend to them in their distinctiveness and integrity. Releasing us for such awareness, it may enable us to break with the petrified and the taken for granted, to break at times with "normalization" itself.”

(Greene, 1994, p. 457)

Thus, the social perspective assumes the agency not only to potentially change oneself, but also social realities. Accordingly, the role of learners is to awaken and act to change the constrained situation. Educators support learners by creating an education environment that facilitates expression of individuality, tolerance and empathy for others as well as opportunity to question reality, while enjoying the empathy, recognition and support for individual, group and social change(Schapiro et al., 2011).In other words, transformative learning cannot be acted upon without being recognised and supported (Fleming, 2011, Nohl, 2009). Therefore, transformative learning, according to the social approach, recognises the individual role of learners situated within a group or social setting, converging the learning and the acting process with the surroundings in an active way.

A stronger activist approach is proposed by O’Sullivan (2002) who argues for a “planetary vision” and “alert citizenry” that not only monitors government policies but also is also conscious of the need for sustainable development and care for the world in times of different economic and

environmental crisis. His definition of transformative learning is more integrative:

“Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and action. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our ways of being in the world. Such shift involves our understanding of ourselves, our self locations; our relationships with other human and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race, and gender, our body awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy.”

(O'Sullivan et al., 2002, p. 11)

Both the individual and the social perspective view individuals as actors who communicate, interact, and act in ways that involve intuition, reflection, decision-making, and purposeful action. Transformative learning is realised through critical reflection, self-exploration and activism. This results in more inclusive, differentiated, more open meaning making structures and alternative ways to engage in and aspire for sustainable development (Greene, 1994, Freire, 1970). In practice, this is translated in becoming more open, responsible, ethical and active towards selves, others, and the environment. However, the individual perspective, which concentrates on transforming the self and integrating the self through discourse or authentic expression, reflects a more isolated change process within the individual. The social approach, concentrating on transforming relationships of the individual with social structures, implies a more integrative change process, involving the individual and the social world.

#### ***Critique of Transformative Learning***

Despite the convergences between the individual and social perspectives, Newman (Newman, 2010) suggests that the remaining gaps and contradictions are so deep that they make the transformative theory a flawed theory. The gaps include the following: 1) the way transformative learning is verified; 2) the way transformative learning is distinguished from other significant learning; 3) the way transformative learning distinguishes

identity and consciousness change; 4) the way transformative learning is achieved; 5) the way learners are engaged in discourse; 6) the way learners are mobilised, and 7) the way learners engage with the spiritual. In discussing the significance of these gaps, he therefore argues that the term has to be completely abandoned and replaced with the term “good learning” that “includes instrumental, communicative, affective, interpretative, essential, critical, political, passionate and moral aspects of learning” (Newman, 2010, p. 16).

The most notable critique addresses the reported examples and verification of transformative learning, including its cognitive and spiritual dimensions. Newman argues that the literature fails to prove that transformative learning is a different degree or type of learning, because it is difficult to isolate what we know and how we know, from what is received and personally constructed knowledge (Newman, 2010). He also claims that the soul, God or other spiritual manifestations are described and reported as taken for granted, lacking methodological rigor and reliability. While one can agree that researchers cannot access the consciousness of their informants, Newman incorrectly completely disregards the reliability of told stories and self-reports, thereby denying the potential of narrative or biographical approaches in recognising subjective experiences, fostering reflection and retrospection, or empowering learners (West et al., 2007, Greene, 1994, Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Moreover, Dix(2016)suggests that the roles of symbols, images and archetypes are misconceived as extra-rational as they are linked with reasoning that represents metaphoric cognition, which is equally important in the process of transformative learning. Kucukaydin and Cranton(2013, p. 47) also criticise the adaptation and usage of the terms *unconscious*, *symbols* and *soul*, among many others, unquestionably, calling for grounding the use of the terms within the epistemological and methodological framework and for clearly limiting generalisations when reporting research. This implies that when using transformative learning as a theoretical framework, one must clearly define terms used and rigorously report methods of data collection and analysis.

While Newman (2010) discards almost all key elements of transformative learning, he does recognise that what is described as transformative learning is a ‘reworking of identity’. He argues that the literature has failed to identify differences between identity and consciousness, as identity change is individual, whereas consciousness change is relational:

“Consciousness is a project in the making from our earliest days until our death. It becomes the medium through which we apprehend the self and give meaning to the world the self inhabits. In this sense, consciousness is a relationship between entities, and not an entity in itself. And in another sense, consciousness is all encompassing, infinite. It is literally all we have, and without it neither the self nor the world exists. A lot of what is described as transformative learning is the reworking of our identity. It tinkers with our being. But learning can do more than that. Whether profound or superficial, any learning effectively done contributes to the continuing creation of our consciousness.”

(Newman, 2010, p. 7)

Newman (2010) refers to consciousness as shaping beliefs, feelings and meaning over time in a community. He is in agreement with Mezirow, who uses the terms *frame of reference* and *habit of mind*. For Mezirow, transformative learning creates a possibility to deepen awareness of social reality, to question the taken for granted, to question and critique the self and social reality ( Mezirow,1991, p. 136), whereas superficial learning, learning errors and distortions(epistemic, sociolinguistic, psychological) may have constraining effects on learners.

The tensions identified in the literature result from disengaging different foci of inquiry in transformative learning. Although the community of researchers in this field exercises an open and discursive culture, the integrative approaches are only theoretically debated and rarely applied in research. Despite the divergences, all perspectives of

transformative learning theory take an idiographic approach to identity, assuming that individuals, although unique, are influenced by a range of factors throughout their life experience, and therefore are able to change. For example, perspective transformation results in “changes in self concept” (Mezirow, 1991.p.193), “individuation” (Dirkx, 2000, Kucukaydin and Cranton, 2013), authenticity (Cranton and Carusetta, 2004), ways of knowing (Kegan, 2000), ways of being in the world (O'Sullivan et al., 2002), and praxis (Freire, 1970). Transformative Learning is viewed as a continuous process, which concurs with Jenkins view on identity, which is neither fixed nor loosely fluid:

“Identity can only be understood as a process of being or becoming. One’s identity-one-s identities, indeed for who we are, is always multi-dimensional, singular and plural-is never a final or settled matter”

(Jenkins, 2008, p. 17)

According to Jenkins, due to their relational nature, changes do not affect only the individual, but are negotiated with the “human world” (Jenkins, 2008, p. 39). He offers an important view of the human world, which can be useful in the discussion of transformative learning.

“I suggest that the world as constructed and experienced by humans can be best understood as three distinct orders:

- *the individual order* is the human world made up of embodied individuals and what goes in their heads;
- *the interaction order* is the human world as constituted in relationships between the individuals and what goes on between people
- *the institutional order* is the human world of pattern and organization of established-ways-of-doing-things”

(Jenkins, 2008, p. 39, original emphasis)

While many studies discuss transformational learning experience and phases that learners go through, less emphasis is given to the way transformative learning outcomes are integrated in the human world by an individual or a group. Changing what we know, how we know, what we do, how we do things, who we are and what we want to be, involves integrating

a transformed frame of reference through the interaction with others in community. Changing frames of reference implies changing or reorganising one or more dimensions of identity. The process takes place over time and not necessarily in sequential phases. Therefore, transformative learning is a process that challenges and changes our frame of reference through a redefinition and reorganisation of our ways of knowing, doing, being and interacting in the world. The outcome of transformative learning is the re-framing of identity that involves agency and negotiation.

### **Transformative Learning in Study Abroad Contexts**

Study abroad contexts differ depending on cultural distance and level and type of programmes. Taylor (2000) argued that despite a general focus on context, studies that explore transformative learning in relationship to difference offer to contribute to further understanding of cultural and contextual dimensions. Taylor and Snyder (2011) in their review of the transformative learning research suggest that transformative learning in cross cultural research is comprehensive. However, they argue that there has been an overreliance on literature reviews of transformative learning research and little critique of the original resources (Taylor and Cranton, 2013, Taylor and Snyder, 2011). Learning outcomes, especially at the postgraduate level, it is argued, involve the development of reflective thinking, intercultural maturity, and authenticity (Pasquariello, 2009, Paxton, 2001, McClintock, 2003, King and Baxter Magolda, 2003, King and Kitchener, 2010, Glisczinski, 2007).

This section reviews studies that investigate transformative learning experiences in post-graduate programmes in higher education contexts. The review is based on a specific search-strategy that aimed to locate studies investigating transformative learning in higher education contexts involving study abroad students<sup>41</sup>. The importance of this topic is justified by the large

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<sup>41</sup> Transformative learning in relation to student experience” or “student journey” or “student identity”) and (graduate or PhD or doctoral or master or study abroad or international or overseas or foreign or UK or sojourner\*) and (return or reintegration or shock

number of studies retrieved through this strategy. In addition, it also confirms Taylor's and Snyders's contention that studies are difficult to access and frequently use the descriptor "transformative" without necessarily involving a theoretical orientation (Taylor and Snyder, 2011). Moreover, many studies failed to describe accurately the level of study or the type of the study abroad experience in their descriptors, which resulted in the retrieval of all kinds of studies with different kinds of cross cultural experiences. For this reason, after the first and second scan of abstracts, 148 results were further investigated for selection based on the following criteria:

- International students enrolled in full time or part time study abroad in post-graduate programs (Master or PhD) of at least one year duration
- Students enrolled in graduate programmes with or without transformative learning intention
- Sojourners and returnees from staff exchange and scholar exchange programmes
- Higher education settings
- Transformative learning as a theoretical framework alone or in combination with other theories
- Grounded theory or theories on identity, adjustment, entry and re-entry
- Methodology chapter (Empirical)

Using the above criteria, 27 studies were selected for close review. These are included in appendix 4.

From the 27 studies reviewed, ten studies used transformative learning alone as a theoretical framework (Boyer et al., 2006, Brock, 2010, Faulk et al., 2010, Gliszinski, 2007, Hamza, 2010, Lennox, 2005, Ritz, 2009, Stevens-Long et al., 2012, Taylor, 2003). Nine studies used Transformative Learning theory in combination with other theories: environment–person interaction schema theory and the Johari

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or post or outcome or impact or effect) was searched in titles and abstracts in the Australian Education Index, British Education Index, ERIC, Proquest, Index to Thesis, Sage, Scopus, Science Direct, Project Muse, NDLTD , World Cat and Ethos. In addition to these proceedings of Transformative Learning Conferences and other studies that came across during reviewing literature were used to purposefully select studies in a separate category.

Window(Chang et al., 2012), symbolic interactionism and intercultural competency(Erichsen, 2009), ‘reverse culture shock’ and intercultural personhood (Gill, 2010), other adult learning and development theories, chaos and complexity theory (Kung, 2007), culture shock, self- efficacy and communication (Milstein, 2005), intercultural adjustment (Park, 2002), social change (Pasquariello, 2009), international experiential education (Tacey, 2012), intercultural competency (Taylor, 1994). Eight other studies reviewed did not use Transformative Learning theory as a framework, but rather found transformative learning as an outcome of a cross-cultural experience. They used network theory and socio-cultural perspectives of learning (Baker and Pifer, 2011), re-entry (Yanrong Chang, 2009), social practice theory (Chapman and Pyvis, 2006), identity (Gu, 2009), cultural identity and repatriation (Sussman, 2002) and grounded theory (Alazzi and Chiodo, 2006, Pasquariello, 2009, Wong, 2008). Therefore, in 17 studies transformative learning theory has been used as a theoretical framework.

#### ***The Focus of the Inquiry***

The inquiry in the reviewed studies is predominantly focused on the individual and can be grouped in three main categories: 1) the process of transformative learning during student involvement in study abroad and graduate programmes; 2) the outcomes of study abroad and graduate programmes; 3) and the role of context and relationships in facilitating and integrating transformation. Besides identifying the existence of transformative learning and its precursor steps (Boyer et al., 2006, Brock, 2010, Glisczinski, 2007), studies also explore triggers or disorienting dilemmas students face, coping strategies used, cognitive and affective processes of development and changes students experience while trying to adapt and adjust (Gu, 2009, Alazzi and Chiodo, 2006, Ritz, 2006, Chang et al., 2012, Boyer et al., 2006, Pasquariello, 2009, Kung, 2007).

Studies that focus on the outcomes of transformative learning experience explore changes in knowledge and attitudes (Faulk et al., 2010), the nature of change in meaning structures (Park, 2002), changes in understanding and consciousness (Sariyant, 2002), changes in personal growth and development (Gu, 2009, Taylor, 1994, Taylor, 2003, Stevens-Long et al., 2012, Milstein, 2005), impact on life choices (Tacey, 2012) and changes in identity (Erichsen, 2009, Wong, 2008). The role of context and integration of transformative learning is explored in four studies (Chapman and Pyvis, 2006, Gill, 2010, Hamza, 2010, Sussman, 2002, Taylor, 2003). Two studies explore the role of relationships in transformative learning experience (Baker and Pifer, 2011, Yanrong Chang, 2009) and three studies investigate the returnees' integration of cross-cultural experience in their home country (Hamza, 2010, Gill, 2010, Wei-Wen Chang, 2009, Sussman, 2002, Yanrong Chang, 2009).

### ***Research Strategies***

The research strategies predominantly follow the interpretative paradigm using mainly qualitative methods. Out of 28 studies, 18 studies used qualitative research strategies; 5 studies used quantitative research strategies; and 5 studies used mixed methods research strategies. Studies were conducted mainly with a number of participants ranging from 1 to 59 or with an average of 21 participants for qualitative studies. When quantitative methods or mixed methods were used, they included a larger number of participants. The table showing destination, types of programmes, samples, methods and instruments can be found in appendix 2.

While qualitative designs are mostly used to explore and explain transformative learning experiences, they are also challenged by the methodology employed to identify transformative learning experiences and outcomes. One of the methodological difficulties is the ability of participants to describe the nature and process of critical reflection or individuation. The research strategies used included case study, phenomenology, and narratives and involved mainly purposeful, snowball

and criteria based sampling. The majority of studies used in-depth interviews. Some studies also used reflective journals, drawing, and reflective rituals. In general, studies were based on retrospective accounts.

Quantitative studies used instruments to measure different aspects of learning. Three studies used King's (2009) Learning Activity Survey (LAS), which identifies if learners have experienced transformative learning, which stages they are identified with, and what learning activities contributed to it. Others used specific instruments that measure self-efficacy and intercultural competence. These studies reported difficulties and limitations connected to student response to the instrument, as well as with identifying the appropriate timing for capturing the transformative learning process. For example, Brock (2010) maintained that reports of precursor steps in the survey instrument did not always match with reports of transformative learning experience. Brock's (2010, p. 137) study could not explain "why respondents (42%) who did not think they changed their beliefs or role expectations in the precursor step question, later reported they had experienced transformative learning." She claimed that it was not possible through this study to judge if there was "shifting going on at an unconscious level or the wording of [particular step] did not elicit recognition of perceptual shifts" (Brock, 2010, p. 137). Glisczinski(2007), on the other hand, acknowledged that during the college experience students may have not been fully aware of its outcome, suggesting a longitudinal approach to study college experience. Although the potential of a longitudinal approach is recognised, Pelletier (2001), who conducted a literature review on international student experience studies in the UK, argues that its absence is justified due to the difficulty of long term dedication and the funding necessary to access the population over a period of time.

The majority of studies are conducted in formal higher education settings in programmes with no specific intention to foster transformative learning. From the six studies (Stevens-Long et al., 2012, Boyer et al., 2006, Brock, 2010, Glisczinski, 2007, Lennox, 2005, Taylor, 2003) covering transformative learning experiences in postgraduate programmes with no

international students, only two studies (Lennox, 2005, Stevens-Long et al., 2012) explored programmes with specific intentions and methodologies to foster transformative learning. Only two studies included staff professional development programmes and scholar exchange programmes. None of the studies targets participants from Kosovo or from the Western Balkans.

### ***Key Findings***

Key findings from this review are organised in three themes: triggering events in cross-cultural learning, critical reflection, and transformative learning outcomes in cross cultural and graduate learning experiences.

### ***Triggering Events in Cross Cultural Learning***

The timing and nature of disorienting events triggered by cross-cultural learning vary depending on student readiness and study abroad experience. A trigger or a disorienting dilemma is identified as a sudden or ongoing encounter or experience that leads to personal crisis. A disorienting experience can happen prior, during or after a cross-cultural experience (Tacey, 2012, p. 80). In cross-cultural learning, a personal crisis is often triggered by academic, language and socialisation problems (Alazzi and Chiodo, 2006, Gu, 2009, Chang et al., 2012, Ritz, 2010, Wong, 2008). In graduate level programmes, engagement in discourse, research, authorship and writing activate higher critical and reflective thinking (Chapman and Pyvis, 2006, Faulk et al., 2010, Gu, 2009, Kung, 2007, Ritz, 2006). Disorienting dilemmas after cross-cultural learning are related to reintegration difficulties (Yanrong Chang, 2009, Gill, 2010, Hamza, 2010, Sussman, 2002). The literature reviewed recognises both negative and positive disorienting dilemmas associated with the nature of experience and the readiness of the learner to engage with strong feelings they bring about.

Disorientation triggers difficulties if there are cultural differences between the home and the host country. Several studies found that disorienting dilemmas related to language difficulties or cultural and

academic difference among international students, were accompanied with negative feelings and responses (Wong, 2008, Gu, 2009, Ritz, 2010, Erichsen, 2009, Alazzi and Chiodo, 2006). For example, Alazi and Chiodo (2006), who studied “problems and coping strategies of eighteen male doctoral students from Middle East studying at an Australian University”, found that limits in language proficiency in writing essays and participating in class discussions triggered a significant personal crisis. They further argued that differences in curriculum structure and academic expectations prevented participants from engaging in independent decision making, such as choosing electives, questioning teachers and communicating effectively. Similarly, Wong (2008) highlights that international students deal with perception errors and stereotypes due to their difficulties in expressing opinions and emotions through language. These studies reveal that in addition to language proficiency, the contexts in which language is used and learning takes place can set off a series of unpleasant feelings and difficult experiences.

Studies describe experiences resulting from differences in the learning context as “learning shock” (Gu, 2009), crisis (Ritz, 2010, Alazzi and Chiodo, 2006) and disequilibrium (Kung, 2007), as accompanied with feelings of loneliness, alienation, rejection, fear, anger and not belonging. Ritz (2010), in her study that aimed “to identify disorienting dilemmas of 12 international graduate students in the struggle to adopt to a new multicultural environment and explore how they relate to transformative learning,” found that students reacted with feelings of fear and anger to disorienting dilemmas triggered by cultural, academic and social differences. Similarly, Gu(2009) who “explored different phases of change and development that Chinese students (and other international students) experience in their adaptation and adjustment to a ‘foreign’ living and studying environment,” found that differences in teaching and learning traditions and differences in values (family, personal independence, social behaviour norms and modes of communication) caused a learning shock. Also, Kung (2007) who explored “the way in which international students in an advanced degree of study experience their new circumstances and give

meaning to these experiences during the life transition they undergo while studying at universities in the United States” found that linguistic hindrance and differences in academic practices and culture caused disequilibrium. Problems in sharing, talking, expressing opinion due to cultural, professional, educational, and communication differences were the main factors leading to dislocation, alienation, insecurity, fear of failure, and heavy workloads.

Studies also reveal that triggers resulting from difference are not always negative. Kung (2007) and Chang (2009) noted that the study abroad experience provided opportunities for novel and contrasting experiences. In addition to negative experiences, participants in Kung’s study also found professional experiences, such as doing research, presenting at conferences, dissertation writing and working, as profoundly challenging and empowering. A Chang (2009) study, which focused on exploring the triggers and the mental processes that encourage individual transformation of 10 international service workers, found that participants in her study experienced a “world-cultural trigger “ which she defines as a “contrasting experience or a reality beyond the existing schema,” in which even experiences related to transport, feasts and weather are perceived as activating. Chang maintains that the trigger initiated exploration of the unknown and created the desire to know the world and expand the worldview. She argues, however, that participants’ new experiences were dramatically different from their experience, highlighting the importance of cultural distance for disorienting experiences and the adaptation process.

It is suggested here that learning experiences, including study abroad experience, have transformative learning potential if they provide engaging learning contexts and relationships that promote questioning and negotiating the learner’s identity in a specific context. At the same time, it is argued that learners enrolling in study abroad programmes do not sign up for a transformative learning curriculum. It was difficult to locate such studies from the literature search, and none of the studies reviewed, involving international students, included programs that had a transformative learning

intention embedded in the curriculum. Only two studies (Pasquariello, 2009) and (Stevens-Long et al., 2011) selected in this review have specially designed programmes with transformative learning intentions. Although students were aware of the engaging nature of the programme, Pasquariello(2009) argues that the “triggering event is accompanied by positive and less positive visceral responses of varying characteristics and dimensions” implying different starting points and responses. These studies argue that the combination of coursework activities, interaction and safe environments are factors that lead to transformative learning outcomes, such as transforming awareness, perspectives and worldviews (Stevens-Long et al., 2012, Pasquariello, 2009).

#### ***The Role of Critical Reflection in Cross Cultural Learning***

According to Mezirow (1991), critical reflection is crucial for any significant learning to happen. Brock (2010) and Gliszinski(2007) found critical reflection to be one of the main precursor steps in the transformative learning process. However, they report that not all participants engage in critical reflection. The nature of reflection, according to Glizincki(2007), engages reevaluation of values, attitudes, feelings, concepts and actions. More than that, Tacey(2012) and Erichsen(2009) found that critical reflection in transformative learning experiences involves questioning self-identity. Tacey (2012, p. 84) highlighted that critical reflection is a way of “re-contextualization” involving assessment of assumptions and beliefs, analysis of identity and analysis of life purposes. From these studies, it can be concluded that critical reflection involves the questioning of cognitive, personal and social dimensions across time and space.

Literature on study abroad recognises the potential of cross-cultural learning as significant learning that takes place through the engagement with otherness and the unknown (Montuori and Fahim, 2004, Savicki, 2008). However, study abroad literature also struggles in documenting transformative outcomes in the cognitive, affective and behavioural domain, through regular study abroad programme evaluation (Savicki, 2008).

Generalising that every study abroad experience instigates critical reflection and is transformative is not viable.

The research studies reviewed argue that learners react and act in different ways when encountering differences, problems and challenges. In Wi-Wen Chang's study (2009), for example, the study abroad experience challenged participants to go beyond their existing meaning frameworks. This challenge created an "interpersonal vacuum, which caused individuals to become more self-reliant and engaged in mental dialogue with themselves while examining their way of life" (Wei-Wen Chang, 2009, p. 239). The study finds that participants engaged in activities such as starting from zero, learning the language, learning about the place, creating new connections, losing old connections and self-attention. She described the process of critical reflection as a "pull and push" and "back and forth" process (Wei-Wen Chang, 2009, p. 244). This process mediated contrasting experiences and competition between the home and host culture, which in turn enabled the extension of participants' cognitive schema and meaning perspectives.

Studies also reveal the influence of culture in learner epistemic perspectives. In Gu's (2009) study, during social adaptation, students reflect on how they learn because of cultural differences. Students describe differences in the learning approaches. The study reveals that positive experiences enable positive adaption over time, which in turn diminishes the influence of the home culture. When learners are immersed in the host academic culture, they experience a 'reflexive change' and 'cultural appropriation' towards becoming more independent learners and adapting to host academic conventions (Gu, 2009, p.44-45). In other words, they assimilate the cultural values of the host, and change their academic roles and practices. Gu (2009) provides examples of how students change the way they write and the way they use literature to develop their written argumentation. Gu (2009) suggests that student experiences are complex and should be analysed from a more holistic and developmental lens. According to her, changes related to their perceptions could also refine and

modify ideological values and reasoning. This implies that changes in the self may further trigger changes in worldviews and know-how.

Although critical reflection is described as a conscious engagement with the disorienting dilemma, the studies reviewed do not describe an intention to engage in critical reflection of assumptions and actions. While critical reflection may be a result of a disorienting dilemma, it is activated as students struggle to make sense of their experiences, adjust, thrive and develop. For example, Erichsen(2009)emphasises that participants in her study did not consciously or deliberately decide to change perspectives or expand worldviews. The learning they reported was reflective and non-reflective, but all contributed to a re-storying of their lives. Her research highlights the centrality of liminal situations, in between worlds for disorientation and critical reflection. However, Erichsen (2009)found the on-going conscious comparisons of cultures, involving continuous decisions of what to accept and hold on to, resulted in a sense of not belonging to either culture. Highly critical reflective thinking and action was described as a continuous struggle to redefine and integrate learning and reinvent identities in new contexts (Erichsen, 2009, p. 118).

Not all studies found that participants engage in critical reflection on assumptions and actions. Two studies found no transformative learning experiences in their participants due to their negative engagement with experience (Ritz, 2006, Alazzi and Chiodo, 2006). In Ritz (2010), study participants experienced disorienting dilemmas, but did not report signs of having critically assessed their personal assumptions. The study reveals that the classroom setting, studying, and writing in a foreign language, did not ensure appropriate conditions for dialogue and discourse to take place. According to Ritz (2010), perceptions of the power of teachers from the country of origin prevented students from freely engaging with lecturers. This dynamic caused participants to withdraw from the questioning process due to a perception of limited values of new perspectives in the country of origin.

Both Ritz (2010) and Alazi and Chiodo (2006) found that participants did not engage in critical reflection during students' stay due to academic pressure to succeed in a foreign country. Participants in Alazi and Chiodo's (2006) study reduced their contact with hosts and became isolated; although they had access to academic counselling services, they did not avail of them. The most frequent coping strategies for loneliness were keeping busy, studying, and seeking help and guidance from fellow citizens. Other strategies used to cope with stress were problem analysis and systematic resolution, which also involved certain appraisal of self-concept.

Another important factor that influences critical reflection is the acceptance of the host culture after the disorienting phase. Although students questioned taken for granted issues and themselves, they did not accept America as the place they belonged and so did not internalise beliefs, attitudes and traditions of the host country. Ritz (2006) similarly argues that cultural dimensions in life histories of participants represented a framework for interpreting new experiences in a significantly different cultural context than that in the host culture. Their meaning making process was bounded with their home context as a source of interpretation of new experiences. These findings are important, because they shed light on the way learners engage with disorienting dilemmas and the role of context in the encouragement or discouragement of their engagement with potentially transformative learning experiences.

It is suggested here that study abroad does not automatically result in transformative learning. Taylor (2003), Gu(Gu, 2009) and Gill (Gill, 2007) highlight the importance of teaching and learning practices in fostering transformative learning. Taylor (2003) found that the graduate degree did not always provide an experience which precipitated a disorienting dilemma, integrative possibilities or critical reflection, and thus resulted in limited change of teaching beliefs. He argues that teaching beliefs cannot be adequately understood without considering other beliefs related to identity, such as epistemological beliefs and teacher practices (Taylor, 2003, p. 364). Gu(2009) similarly argues that although participants were very critical of their prior education experience, such as inexperience engaging with

different perspectives, independent learning and problems solving skills, the gap mostly arises from teaching and learning approaches that promoted conformist and non-critical learning, rather than from student capacity to engage in critical thinking or problem solving (Gu, 2009, p. 172).

In terms of readiness, Gill (Gill, 2007, p. 173) noted that adaptation required a positive attitude and willingness to engage in different academic and cultural practices, which then enabled ongoing comparison and reflection. Gill (2007) contends that apart from cultural differences and epistemological beliefs, beliefs such as those related to student identity and previous student practices should be considered when analysing the transformative potential of study abroad experience. This suggests that a learning process, which involves assessing prior learning experiences and acquiring and fusing different perspectives, may have the potential for transformative learning.

The role of discourse in critical reflection and consequent actions is also mentioned in the selected studies. Very often, the ability of international students to engage in the local or academic discourses in a foreign language and culture is taken for granted. Sariyant(2002) finds that issues such as differences between discourses, differences in socio and cultural values, such as individualism, collectivism or contradictions of labels such as western, developed and underdeveloped, should be given careful consideration. As Wong (2008)suggests, the language ability and communication modes of international students create perception errors and stereotypes because much of the evaluation of what is right and wrong is interpreted from the host country context and culture. However, Wong's study also points out the importance of close teacher student relationships in supporting student language expression and adaptation challenges, suggesting that language proficiency, contact with hosts, supportive student-teacher relationships and a longer time spent abroad facilitate confident participation in host and academic community discourses.

The studies reviewed point out the blending nature of the rational and extra rational processes during reflection. However, studies report few activities that intentionally fostered engagement with spirituality or self-reflection, such as writing journals, contemplative exercise and drawing. Even in the two studies that did have a transformative learning curriculum, the dialogue with subconscious that supports individuation was not dominant. Stevenson-Lang et al (2012), highlight that participants did not report dialogue with the subconscious, although dialogue is supported by self-reflection activities, workshops and mentors' support. As they explain:

“There was no mention of dialogue with the subconscious as a means to individuation or self-development outcomes, although self-reflection was one of the experiences that respondents mentioned with some frequency. This experience is likely an individual preference and is supported by workshops and faculty mentors for those students who are drawn to that approach. “

(Stevens-Long et al., 2012, p. 192)

Pasquariello(2009, p. 77) similarly noted that participants in his study already possessed advanced academic preparation and cognitive abilities as reflective thinkers. His study suggests that critical reflection involved deconstruction and reformulation of meaning schemes triggered by disorientation and reorientation, which primarily engaged cognitive engagement, followed by affective engagement (Pasquariello, 2009, p. 85). This implies that extra rational engagement is interlinked with the disorienting dilemmas, and that critical reflection is stimulated by their emotional charge.

While self-reflection activities have been recognised to foster transformative learning in several studies using LAS, it seems that these activities are not very widely found in regular higher education programmes. According to Selby (2008), self-reflection activities that facilitate entry and re-entry of international students are missing, suggesting that students should have the opportunity to experience some sort of closure before returning home, in order to be able to effectively function and integrate across contexts. The reintegration phase of international students

presents another research avenue to explore transformative learning holistically.

#### *Transformative Learning Outcomes in Cross Cultural Experiences*

The reviewed studies provide evidence that cross-cultural experience involves stress, academic problems and uncertainty, from differences in the cultural and academic practices and from pressure to succeed in a different cultural and academic environment (Alazzi and Chiodo, 2006, Chang et al., 2012, Kung, 2007, Sariyant, 2002). They also offer insight into how study abroad experience acts like a trigger with transformative learning potential (Chang et al., 2012, Wong, 2008, Savicki, 2008, Boyer et al., 2006, Pasquariello, 2009). The outcomes reported can be grouped into two categories: personal growth and development (Chapman and Pyvis, 2006, Baker and Pifer, 2011, Erichsen, 2009, Gu, 2009, Milstein, 2005, Taylor, 1994, Faulk et al., 2010, Park, 2002, Ritz, 2010) and identity exploration, negotiation and shift (Yanrong Chang, 2009, Erichsen, 2009, Wong, 2008, Tacey, 2012, Sussman, 2002, Gill, 2010, Hamza, 2010).

#### *Personal growth and development*

Growth is defined by Oxford Dictionary (2016, no page) as “the process of developing physically, mentally, or spiritually.” This definition implies adding personal qualities. Gould (1978) refers to personal growth as an ability to supersede personal restrictions and expand options for future development. This definition implies working on restraints, which may also include changing existing qualities. In general, personal growth can include adding and changing personal qualities in all aspects of the person in order to enhance one’s self-concept, professional competence and relationships.

The research on cross cultural learning identified a number of positive outcomes, like professional growth (Faulk et al., 2010), increased communication and self efficacy skills (Milstein, 2005), affective, cognitive and behavioural maturity (Yanrong Chang, 2009), increased tolerance and confidence (Milstein, 2005), increased individualism and self-sufficiency (Wong, 2008), enhanced cultural awareness (Faulk et al., 2010, Gill, 2010),

increased self-esteem and self-image (Park, 2002) and intercultural competency (Gill, 2007, Taylor, 1994)). The literature also identified cognitive outcomes such as higher order cognitive skills ((Stevens-Long et al., 2012), more complex ways of thinking and authorial self (Faulk et al., 2010). Some studies also identified negative outcomes such as alienation and marginalisation. In general, the cross-cultural experience provides fertile ground for self-knowledge in light of the host culture's context and through others lenses.

#### *Identity negotiation, shift and integration*

During cross-cultural experience, many taken for granted issues related to how learners identify themselves are challenged. Learners are faced with perceptions the hosts have of them, mainly based on images and stories from the media and their speaking and writing abilities. In addition, when learners interact with others through language and nonverbal communication, their meanings assigned to words and practices are always charged with the home culture, requiring them to clarify intended meaning when they communicate in a foreign language. Challenged with differences, they make meaning from what is expected from them through others' perspectives. When their meaning perspective is not adequate to explain the experience, they are triggered to understand themselves, others and their ways of knowing, doing and being.

Chang *et. al* (2012), for example, found that through self-exploration, learners reveal their unknown selves. Although not all activities involve critical reflection, Chang et.al (2012) suggests that revealing unknown selves instigates a redefinition of oneself. She maintains:

“By observing their own struggles and limitations, they became more appreciative and sensitive to other people's needs and weaknesses. Through a deeper understanding of themselves, they developed a deeper understanding of humanity in general. “

(Chang et.al, 2012, p. 246)

Self-reflection in this instance recognises positive and negative aspects of inner self and thus may enable better relationships with others. Gu (2009) similarly refers to the experience as “transitional and rebirth experience”. Gu(2009, p. 47) contends that when learners change and develop new ways of thinking, life style, interests and roles they give birth to new selves, in search of balance. If balance is achieved, the outcomes are reported to be positive. If balance is not reached the experience is recounted as negative. Gill (2007, p. 372) describes identity exploration as a search for originality and identity change as including “sense of self, ways of seeing and perceiving the world, values, and (work-related) ethics”. She maintains:

“Intercultural identity seems to encompass two dimensions: (1) a clear understanding of oneself as an individual person with unique qualities, beliefs, values and commitments; and (2) an awareness of the sources of one’s self which are rooted in one’s own culture and influenced by other cultures that the person has been deeply immersed in. The awareness of the sources of self seems to be developed through an investigative process in which the individual reflects deeply on his/her own culture in the light of an understanding of other cultures, and vice versa. Together with an awareness of the roots of oneself, the individual is more capable of transforming his/ her identity to embrace a common humanity that transcends all cultures and nations.

*(Gill, 2007, p. 373)*

Identity change is a complex and relational process. International students are simultaneously charged with efforts to adapt, adjust and learn, as well as to acquire membership in the educational and social communities. Chapman and Pyvis (2006) who studied “dilemmas in the formation of student identity in a graduate programme delivered by an Australian University in Hong Kong”, argue that learners pursue development of an identity that presumes membership of the educational community in ways that make them feel belonging or not belonging. This is described as fitting in or of reconciling different other identities (Chapman and Pyvis, 2006, p. 295). In negotiating this identity, they found that the nature of the programme and communication with supervisors create the feeling of belonging to the

learning community, because the learning community is perceived to be local.

Similarly, other situations where learners feel they do not belong create a situation of “in between” (Bhabha, 1990) that is explained as like “nowhere and everywhere”. Situated between the host and home country, learners also develop a hybrid identity, which is a way of being in two cultures (Gill, 2007, Wong, 2008). Bakhtin (1982p.359) explains hybridity relevant to study abroad students. Bakhtin argues that when experiencing another culture, people make sense of the world through their own meaning structures, absorbing at the same time aspects of the other culture while creating a new frame of reference, which is neither equivalent to the original culture nor to the foreign culture. Because it is neither one nor the other, it creates the feeling of consonance and dissonance (Harris 1999, p. 44). In terms of transformative learning theory, the learner resolves the collision between the two systems by assessing the premises, on which they are based, and thus accepting, rejecting and changing meaning perspectives and transforming them. This implies that boundaries are not totally fixed, but more fluid and it is at this “third space”(Bhabha, 1990, p. 221) or “at the boundaries” (Akkerman and Bakker, 2011) where identity work takes place.

According to Sussmann (2002), the literature has delineated four types of identity shaping in cross-cultural experience: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation. Sussmann (2002, p. 395) argues that those experiencing identity loss experience more repatriation stress. The greater repatriation distress sojourners experience, there is less satisfaction and preparation to return home. Emphasising that students are often not fully aware of the changes they had undergone, Sussmann(1986) contends that re-entry problems are caused by the unexpectedness of re-entry problems, inaccurate perceptions of the changes happening in the country and expectations of their families, friends and co-workers to behave in the same way. This concurs with other studies (Chang et.al, 2012, Szkudlarek, 2010) that contend that changes may not be fully articulated

during the cross-cultural experience, but that they are negotiated later at home.

The negotiation process is very important in understanding the transformative learning outcomes from cross-cultural experience. The literature on transformative learning suggests that perspective transformation is irreversible (Mezirow, 1991), however as it is revealed from this review, it may not be a complete process. Chang (2009) maintains that re-entry is not only the behavioural and psychological adjustment of the returnee, but it is co-produced in relationship with others. For example in Chang's study, mothers perceive their children to have changed their cultural values, as well as having grown and gained more affective, cognitive and behavioural maturity. These changes caused conflict and motherhood identity confusion that prompted renegotiation of the mother-child interaction. Similarly, Szkudlarek(2010, p. 4) suggests that adopted behaviours learned and performed in the host country are sometimes challenged and negated by others, necessitating relearning social skills and accepting duality. This suggests that transformation is not a complete process and is dependent on the way one negotiates and integrates reshaped identity in the home context. Therefore, when exploring transformative learning potential in cross-cultural experience, it is important to understand both the learner and the circumstances in which learning takes place. Kegan(2000) suggests that the "form" which transforms, is "the way of knowing", arguing that changing frames of reference means changing personal epistemology. This implies that when we want to understand the learner we need to understand their personal epistemology.

### **Conclusions**

From the theoretical point of view, the integrative approach in transformative learning enables the analysis of study abroad experience as a 'boundary crossing' experience in which ways of knowing, ways of being and ways of interacting are questioned, transformed and integrated. As a learning theory, transformative learning presumes a process (learning

experience) and outcome (learning outcome) resulting from learning experience. Although some studies attempt to identify activities and practices that foster transformative learning (King, 1996, King, 2009), more careful consideration should be given to the types of activities and learning experiences that foster transformative learning and the learning outcomes resulting from learning experiences.

The literature also makes a strong connection between disorienting dilemmas and the consequent reactions and actions these trigger. In this respect, it is important to analyse the nature of disorientation and its emotional charges, which can be both encouraging and restrictive. In cross cultural learning, the contradictions and differences between home and host countries are not only of an epistemic nature, that is, how learners know and use knowledge, but also related to how they perceive themselves as members of the educational community and of the host culture. Although critical reflection seems to result from disorienting dilemma, approaches that deconstruct dimensions of disorientation and critical reflection could explain their influence on the nature of changes associated with transformative learning outcomes. This approach would facilitate a clear distinction of transformative learning from other types of learning.

In terms of context, while the literature on transformative learning generalises the importance of safe and conducive environments, the studies covering cross-cultural learning experiences reveal challenging and unfamiliar environments, thus questioning the level of control one has when experiencing transformative learning. This poses an important question about how the individual and social aspects interact in the process of identity change. First, international students face academic practices that are deeply embedded in the culture of the institution, to which they are obliged to adhere in order to succeed. Second, as students are not fully situated in the host country, they coexist within the home and the host context. While they are pressed to overcome differences in order to succeed, changes students undergo, as well as differences of practices with those of their home country, may need to be negotiated after they return. This provides an important research avenue for analysis: the reintegration phase of

transformative learning. Importantly, as there are no previous studies exploring the study abroad experience of Kosovo students using a transformative learning framework, findings from this research provide useful comparisons with the growing literature on this topic.

In terms of methodologies, many literature reviews suggest that transformative learning be studied with a bigger sample, mixed methods designs and in more than one group situated in a single situ (Taylor and Laros, 2014). However, at the same time, it is suggested that key constructs be routed in the data and evidenced. While bigger samples would provide useful comparison, I argue that rigorous analysis of prior learning experience, disorientation dilemmas, critical reflection and changes learners experience, can be better studied through investigating learner experience across time and contexts. This approach, however, would require longitudinal approaches, which are very often difficult to pursue during PhD studies. Therefore, research designs that encapsulate the time and space dimension in narratives as retrospective accounts may be useful to explain transformative learning as a process and as an outcome.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

### **Narrative Inquiry: Rationalising the Design Strategy**

The aim of this research is to explore the ways in which study abroad experiences contribute to identity transformations. The research purpose conceptually fits within the qualitative research design in the domain of interpretive paradigm, which, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), aims to understand the subjective world of the human experience. Qualitative research is constructionist by nature because participants and researchers construct meaning shaped by their background, experiences and contexts in interaction with each other (Crotty, 1998, Silverman, 2004, Creswell, 2003). Qualitative designs usually employ interviews, focus groups, group interviews and observation to explore and interpret socially constructed meaning, in contrast to testing theories or employing experimental and non-experimental designs. While quantitative designs are more concerned with securing the representative sample and methods that would pass the validity and reliability test, qualitative designs do not attempt generalisations, but in-depth understanding of the phenomena from a smaller number of participants.

Interpretative paradigm emphasises the role of experience, which is subjective and therefore varied and numerous (Creswell, 2003, p. 8). However, according to Dewey, experience “is both personal and social,” happening in continuity in time and place which is interpreted and re-interpreted through narratives (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 2). This point of view, according to Schutz (1962, in Cohen et al., 2000), sees the individual as part of a reality which is socially, culturally and historically constructed. According to him, while individuals live within their “stream of consciousness” in their “life world”, they make sense of their experience by inputting meaning retrospectively, by looking back through reflexivity and by interacting as active actors within the social context (Schutz (1962) in Cohen et al., 2000, p. 24).

Narrative Inquiry as a design strategy is located within the qualitative paradigm (Cohen et al., 2000, Creswell, 2003). As a separate research methodology, it has been described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), as inquiry working at the “reductionist and formalistic boundaries” with tension on the part of the researcher when trying to position narrative inquiry in all phases of the research process (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 40, Clandinin and Murphy, 2009). According to them, narrative inquiry begins with experience, and integrates the researcher’s autobiography into the research puzzle, with the aim of expressing interest, background and personal theories that lead to research questions. Therefore, narrative inquiry views theory and literature as “a conversation between theory and life”(Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 41).

Narrative inquiry, according to Webster and Mertova (2007), is not described as a single method but to be combined with other methodological approaches. Narrative, according to Webster and Mertova(2007), appropriately addresses human centred experience, embodied in the complexity of life contexts, through stories. Moreover, education as a form of experience is described narratively and thus it is best studied narratively (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, Clandinin and Murphy, 2009).

“Lives are lived, told, retold, and relived in storied ways on storied landscapes. In order to study experience narratively, we understand it as a storied phenomenon.”

(Clandinin and Murphy, 2009, p. 598)

Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 32) refer to two main interconnected factors borrowed from Dewey: continuity and interaction. According to them, events happen over time, thus individuals and collectives have a past, present and future which interact in continuum in a particular context. Therefore, education experiences such as curriculum, performance, teaching and learning can be interpreted differently. They claim that the phenomenon should be given narrative interpretation in order to be meaningful (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 31). Narrative inquiry therefore uncovers the social and cultural contexts in which participants make sense of their

experience, by describing people, places, relationships and processes as sequences of experiences, thereby capturing the whole story, and not only short term recorded experiences at certain points.

“In our thinking about the narrative inquiry, our terms are personal and social (interaction); past, present and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation). This set of terms creates a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and social along the second dimension, and place along the third. Using this set of terms any particular inquiry is defined in this three dimensional space; Studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and the social in balance appropriate to the inquiry, and they occur in specific places or sequences of places.”

(Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 50)

In this way, the narrative inquiry enables exploring participant study abroad experiences in this study, through interviews in the form of storied experiences. According to Webster and Mertova(2007, p. 23) as such, stories contain scene, plot, character, events as well as other data available, such as documents, diaries and survey data which accordingly enhance the time, scene and plot structures of the individual or shared critical events.

“An event becomes critical in that it has some of the following characteristics. It has affected the performance of the storyteller in a professional or work related role. It may have a traumatic component, attract excessive interest by the public or the media, or introduce risk in the form of personal exposure: illness, litigious action or other powerful personal consequences. However, what makes a critical event critical is the impact it has on the storyteller (Bohl, 1995). It is almost always a change in experience and it can only ever be identified afterwards.”

(Webster and Mertova, 2007, p. 73)

Critical events identified in retrospect can lead to future actions. Therefore narratives that include three-dimensional perspectives, require the researcher to engage in the narrative and ask participants to reflect on events. Consequently, research designs that include methods with face-to-face interaction are considered more appropriate for narratives of a reflective nature.

### **Methods: The Active Interview**

This study uses the active interview (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) as the most appropriate method for recognising the interviewee as a participant in the meaning making process. According to Silverman (2004), active interviewing is a constructivist model of conducting and analysing interviews. The active interview is not structured. It is viewed as a conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee, who base their communication around the research topic. Holstein and Gubrium(1995, p. 16) locate the active interview ontologically in the interpretative paradigm as an interpretive practice, in which reality is constituted at the nexus of the how's and what's of the experience,

“Active interviewing is a form of interpretative practice involving respondents and interviewer as they articulate ongoing interpretative structures, resources and orientations...meaning is not constantly formulated a new, but reflects relatively enduring local conditions, such as research topics of the interviewer, biographical particulars and local ways of orienting to those topics.”

(Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p. 16)

Active interviewing sees the respondent as narrator, possessing a “stock of knowledge” as “a stock at hand” (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p. 30). Information is reflected upon or constructed in relation to the interview questions, participant role taking or perspective and the dynamics of the interview. The interviewer's role is to activate the stock of knowledge through use of background knowledge, shared experience or conceptual issues or questions (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995).

“Stocks of knowledge are only partially historical. Because the knowledge the respondent calls on is always knowledge in the making. It does not purely reflect the respondent's past. The past is linked with what is being made of the present, that is, the respective positions from which one can speak of life.”

(Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p. 31-32)

For this particular study, active interviewing facilitates participants in capturing their experiences of integration through retrospective accounts of study abroad experiences and through drawing comparisons with familiar contexts in Kosovo. Participants reveal meaning perspectives within ordinary settings by moving in time and space. They begin with the Kosovo experience, which is diverse and very often emotionally charged. Moving the story to the UK often consists of two types of reflections: retrospective reflection of the experience and introspective reflection of the experience in both the UK and Kosovo from the current perspective.

*“I had a feeling of superiority. I always have this feeling when I finish one level of education. Now when I think about it I laugh about it. I felt like, I finished faculty university degree and I am somebody. “*

(Interview with Ilir, 2012)

Similarly in the example below the interviewee moves back and forth in time and space by comparing experiences with present time in their ordinary context where they work and live.

*“In Kosovo, it was problematic to meet a professor. The professor is busy. He kept his lecture and went out from the university building. You couldn't reach them in the office. If you could find them in the office, they didn't have time for you. You didn't have freedom to contact them [**past in Kosovo**]... Here a professor deals with 800 to 1000 students. He does not have time for them so he neglects students. It is also the culture. As professors, they have attitude: “I am authoritative even after classes”. When they pass in the corridor, they keep an authority attitude:” I am the professor here” [**Present in Kosovo**] There the professor was not authoritative in the corridor or in a cafe. He is equal with you. But in class he*

*treats you as a student. He doesn't recognise the period before class or the relationship you have."* [**Past in UK**].

(Interview with Leka, 2012)

Recognising that experience is individual and social, the conversational style allows deeper understanding of the nuances of the personal within the social. Whenever life stories are reinterpreted, they are open to reformulation as one makes sense of their action and experience by integrating past, present and future or by shifting, as a result of relatedness (Tennant, 2005).

The example below is an extract from the interview with one of the participants. The questions posed by the researcher go with the conversational flow naturally, seeking further exploration and relating interview responses with previous responses while actively engaging in meaning making.

**L:** *So for things that were new to everyone, like us from the region and the rest, there was no problem. We could be the best. For things that you need to have a foundation, knowledge, we were lagging behind the European students.*

**B:** *What do you mean?*

**L:** *We have many "holes" [gaps] in the education system, or in the way, we use our knowledge?*

**B:** *What do you mean? You were one of the best students.*

**L:** *One of the best students in the system. I was lacking writing skills, even reading culture. Being critical of what I'm reading or saying.*

**B:** *So you are saying that was a challenge?*

**L:** *Yes a challenge, because you had to compensate all that in a short period of time and perform.*

**B:** *So what did you do, how did you feel?"*

(Interview with Leka, 2012)

Active interviews are closer to normal interaction because in normal interactions these same elements are present. When we interact with others, we are aware of each other, we have an assigned role, we try to impress, we decide what to emphasise, reveal and hide. That is why by participating actively; the researcher can seek clarifications, relate to previous responses and infer meaning from not only what participants are saying but also how they are saying it.

### **Criticisms of the Method**

Qualitative research has been considered less reliable or valid than the dominant quantitative approach in educational institutions, the research community and others interested in or using research (Denzin et al., 2006, Seale and Silverman, 1997). In quantitative research, theory hypotheses are tested to determine the usefulness of a theory, with the intention of producing scientific methods based on measurements, when seeking objective realities. Thus, objective reality must pass the test of validity and reliability. According to Anfara and Mertz (2006), in social research, many theories can be used to explain the same phenomena, depending on whether the focus of inquiry is on the individual, group, organisation or society.

Although qualitative designs are considered to be emergent (Creswell, 2003, p. 181), according to Robson (2005, p. 61) theories “can range from formal large-scale systems developed in academic disciplines to informal hunches or speculations from laypersons, practitioners or participants in the research”. The qualitative theoretical framework adopted in this study intends to situate the conversation within the research topic in a particular discipline (Webster and Mertova, 2007).

Interview data in narratives, similarly, are criticised as invalid and unreliable due to interview bias, self-presentation motives and inaccuracies affected by memory (Cohen et al., 2000, Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, Goffman, 1956). The traditional interview sees the interviewer and the

interviewee as objects exposed to the interview process unbiased by each other's experience.

“ At all times the interviewer must remember that he is the data collection instrument and try not to let his own biases, opinions or curiosity affect his behaviour....The respondent should be kept from rambling away from the essence of question, but not at the sacrifice of courtesy.”

*(Tuckman in Cohen et al., 2000, p. 279)*

This view according to (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) assigns self-control and power over the respondents on how the interview will flow, as if the respondent is a subject in the laboratory of rigorous research with strict protocol and structured questions. Therefore, looking at the interview as a neutral information gathering process and the interviewee as informant, is limited because it ignores positionality of both participants in the interview, where neither of them has control over the encounter.

“The interview became not just a straightforward and unproblematic elicitation of information—in the way most qualitative researchers would assume this process to occur—but an interactional process by active agents whose identities and issues of self-presentation had to be managed. Research interviewing is not part of quotidian life for most individuals, which means that participating in this activity system demands a specific re-orientation and concomitant management of identity.”

*(Lee and Roth, 2004)*

According to Goffman(1956), in encounters participants engage in identity work involving presentation of self corresponding to a particular situation or role. Members participating in interviews, as interactional events, draw on their cultural knowledge and knowledge about each other. This membership categorisation, according to Baker (2004), organises meaning making through making use of and locating central categories, such as people, places and things during the interaction. Miller and Glassner(2004) also acknowledge that narratives emerging in interview contexts come from the lived world outside the interview setting and that participation in a particular culture creates the cultural stories that are told

from a particular point of view, which the researcher may or may not fully understand. This infers that all accounts are dependent on the situational and positional circumstances in participants' lives.

However, bias is present in quantitative designs too. According to Schwarz (1999), respondents interpret questions in context and their responses may be influenced by question wording, question format and question context. According to him, while open questions may influence decisions on what is relevant, interesting and appropriate, closed questions may not include all elements of the experience or the same understanding of frequency scales and reference periods. Therefore, quantitative designs that obtain data through surveys are not appropriate for obtaining an in-depth understanding of lived experiences. They also offer no opportunities for clarifications.

As it is found from the literature review, different strategies are used in cross-cultural research with a prevalence of qualitative methods. In the absence of longitudinal research because of requirements for long-term dedication and funding to access the population over a period of time (Pelletier, 2001), most studies reviewed by Pelletier (2001) take a "snapshot of the international student experience" as a recorded experience in a specific location, with a particular cohort of students, conducted during the study abroad experience.

International students in the UK are important stakeholders in the higher education system. The largest number of international students is Asian students. Whereas there is an increase of interest among institutions to address cultural differences and cultural adaptation, there is limited understanding about the implementation of skills and qualifications of international students in their home countries and about other re-entry issues related to their study abroad experience (Pelletier, 2001, p. 11).

Recognising that the intent of sharing experience might influence what and how much is shared, Alea and Bluck(2003) argue that specific events and life periods are remembered as meaningful experiences. Therefore, this study explores the study abroad experience holistically

through active interview methods that intend to capture the whole story through narrative. This method captures pre-departure experience, UK experience and return experience, concurring with Webster and Mertova (2007):

“Narrative inquiry attempts to capture the whole story, whereas other methods tend to communicate understanding of studies subjects or phenomena at certain points, but frequently omit the intervening stages”

(Webster and Mertova, 2007, p. 3)

### **The Role of the Researcher: Outsider and Insider**

My background in the higher education sector has given me in-depth knowledge about the education system in Kosovo. Moreover, it also facilitated access to study abroad databases, which provided opportunities to recruit potential participants from a wider pool. The fact that I did not study in the UK, in contrast to the study participants, gave me outsider status in the research process. However, being one of the scholarship beneficiaries<sup>42</sup>, gave me, at the same time, an insider status or feeling of belonging among the research participants. This similarity of my role with that of the participants provided opportunity for a good rapport during the interview. At the same time, it gave me the opportunity to explore the distinct study abroad experiences of the participants. My researcher role did not distance me as a listener. I was an active participant in conversation because in most of the cases, we knew each other personally or belonged to a community where we knew about each other. This does not mean that during the interview participants were challenged or interrogated, but in some circumstances, knowledge of the context, people and places brought value to the conversation, while also observing interview ethics. In the example below my knowledge of the participant’s public presentation is brought up in the conversation to seek clarification.

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<sup>42</sup> I was a scholarship beneficiary of the Canadian International Development Agency programme between 2005 and 2007.

**B:** *I am referring to your contribution to the [X Publication].*

*Why did you title your article “XXXXXX”?*

**I:** *Kosovo for me is such a place, where you are stuck and cannot go out, so there is a need for voices that would tell things as they are. So this was the idea, I am writing from this XXXX<sup>43</sup>, this place, hoping that my voice will reach audiences. Secondly, it was important to have a space where I could express my opinions and my ideas. “.....*

(Interview with Ilir, 2012)

## **Research Procedures**

### ***Study Population and Sampling***

For this research, sixteen participants were selected from approximately 173<sup>44</sup> Kosovar scholarship beneficiaries who completed postgraduate studies in UK universities between 2000 and 2011. A combination of snowball techniques and interrogation of the scholarship database was used to identify research participants. In the first stage, scholarship scheme coordinators and alumni associations were contacted to request lists of scholarship beneficiaries with contact details. In some cases, the database was sent by email to the researcher, and in other cases it was agreed that the survey link will be sent by the scholarship providers to beneficiaries. In the second stage, information for research participants enlisted in public announcements in official scholarship websites were interrogated. Scholarship beneficiaries' contact details were confirmed or obtained through “mediators” Kirstensen and Ravn (2015, p. 725) from different schemes. Therefore, snowballing is considered beneficial to get contact information due to limitation to access restricted data, such as in this case to access official database of educational migrants for all scholarship schemes.

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<sup>43</sup> Due to identification risk words were omitted from the publication version

<sup>44</sup> 62 scholarship students from Chevening Scholarships (2001-2010), 82 EU Scholarships, 63 OSI and Staffordshire University Scholarships.

In 2011 a request to participate in the study was sent to 273 potential participants in all scholarship schemes including American scholarship schemes<sup>45</sup> via the questionnaire for highly skilled returnees prepared for the study “Brain Circulation and the Role of the Diaspora in the Balkans” (Cipuseva et al., 2013). From these, 83 students responded, out of which 43 were UK students. UK students were selected because they represented the largest number of students from one single country in the sample (N 170) and because selection of one country provided the possibility to minimise contextual variables.

The survey respondents were asked if they would agree to participate in the researcher’s study for the purpose of PhD dissertation. The sample, to some extent, is self-selective, because it is drawn from willing participants. While, the whole sample was contacted through the survey, according to Kristensen and Ravn(2015) the recruitment of informants is influenced by the relevance of research project for participants and their interest to tell their story, thus influencing the kind of voices included in the research. In this respect, self-selection is limited to those participants that showed interest in participating in the research. In addition, Kristensen and Ravn (2015) suggest that in order to avoid bias, the researcher should dedicate time, apply follow up procedures and additional selection criteria. In this respect, the researcher sent email reminders to all those who did not respond as well as applied other selection criteria: 1) time spent abroad (more than one year) and 2) the period of return (more than six months and less than 10 years). The latter criteria were chosen to enable learners to reflect more critically after experiences of reintegration, thus recognising that the transformation process takes time and is not straight forward (Merriam, 2004, Merriam, 2006, Moore, 2005, King and Kitchener, 2010).

#### ***Arranging and Conducting Interviews***

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<sup>45</sup> 31 students from KAEF scholarships and 28 students from Ron Brown scholarships, 16 other combined scholarships.

Participants (N=30) who responded positively made available their telephone numbers and emails. Three participants were not selected because they had just returned, and thus did not meet the criteria of time of return. Participants were requested to respond to an adopted Learning Activities Survey, LAS, (King, 2009) which intended to identify whether participants had experienced perspective transformation, and which learning activities had contributed to it (King, 2009)<sup>46</sup>. Other selection criteria were gender, scholarship scheme, place of work, thus avoiding selecting participants who are concentrated in one institution. Consequently, 24 participants were selected and were contacted in 2012 by email or telephone to arrange interviews, but not all of them were available, and so finally, 16 participants were selected for in-depth interviews. Interviews were conducted from February 2012 to December 2013. Three participants had completed master studies in UK and at the time of the interview they were completing PhD studies at the same university in UK. One participant was completing PhD Studies in UK during the piloting phase and had submitted the dissertation when interviewed for the second time.

#### *Participant Demographic Information*

Fifteen participants in the study are ethnic Albanians. Only one participant has a mixed ethnicity. Eight participants are male and eight are female. They all lived in Kosovo prior to studying abroad, with the exception of two participants who lived for a longer periods of time in Europe, namely Belgium and the UK and one participant who lived for a short period in Greece. In terms of generations, participants were between 23 and 40 years old at the time of the interviews. More specifically, their education experience in Kosovo took place between 1978 and 2009.

All participants belong to middle class families with cultural capital obtained through education. According to Suvin(2012, p. 45) the middle class in Yugoslavia refers to “employees and non-manual workers, divided

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<sup>46</sup> Survey excluded only three questions (3, 5 and 6) from LAS.

at least into the fractions of white-collar workers, both in industry and outside it, then engineers and technicians, and the intelligentsia, mainly in human sciences.” To include the later context I adopt the definition by (Fitzgerald, 2014) in which middle class are “those with incomes in the middle third of the income distribution; who work as upper or lower level managers, professionals, or small business owners; who graduated from a four-year college or university; and whose primary source of wealth is home ownership”. Table 1 describes demographic information of participants.

**Table 2 Participant Demographic Information**

Nr	Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Family background	Scholarship Scheme
1	Alisa	Albanian	28	F	Engaged *	Middle	Young Cell
2	Arbnor	Albanian	28	M	Married	Middle	OSI/Staffordshire University
3	Blend	Albanian	36	M	Married	Middle	OSI/Staffordshire University
4	Doni	Albanian	29	M	Single	Middle	Young Cell
5	Donika	Albanian	24	F	Single	Middle	OSI/Staffordshire University
6	Engjell	Albanian	33	M	Married	Middle	Young Cell
7	Fiona	Albanian	23	F	Single	Middle	Young Cell
8	Illir	Albanian	28	M	Single *	Middle	OSI/Staffordshire University
9	Jora	Albanian	38	F	Married	Middle	Chevening
10	Jorik	Albanian	33	M	Married	Middle	OSI/Staffordshire University
11	Leka	Albanian	32	M	Married	Middle	OSI/Staffordshire University
12	Linda	Albanian	41	F	Married	Middle	Combined /MEST
13	Rina	Mixed	35	F	Married	Middle	Chevening
14	Rron	Albanian	32	M	Married	Middle	Chevening
15	Vlera	Albanian	30	F	Single *	Middle	Young Cell
16	Yllka	Albanian	24	F	Single	Middle	Young Cell

**Notes:**

Age and marital status at the time of interview

\* Now married

The place and time of the interview was chosen by the participants. The interview was done in a conversational manner. The researcher piloted the interview with two participants before conducting other interviews. An interview guide (Appendix 2) was prepared to facilitate the interview process. The interviewing was not organised through a strict protocol, as it allowed engaging in conversation about their life experience. However, the guide intended to orient the researcher and help noting if questions were addressed. Therefore, the researcher did not pose all of the questions or probe questions if the interviewees addressed them during their narrative.

Participants agreed that the researcher could use survey data obtained from the previous study for this study. Before starting the interview, participants were given the informed consent form (Appendix 2). After they have read the form and had the chance to ask questions, they had the option to agree or disagree to audio recording the interview. The interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. While the interviews were conducted in Albanian, the transcript was done directly in English by the researcher, to allow better data analysis, using NVIVO. Half of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher and the other half by a court English translator and interpreter, who signed a confidentiality form, in order to guarantee the safeguarding of information. In the form, the translator also signed the copies of the audio file, to be destroyed immediately after transcription. File destruction was confirmed by the translator and all interviews were checked by the researcher for content and quality.

#### *Data Analysis Overview*

Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data collection. Theory influenced initial categorisation but the researcher remained open to make meaning from interview data. Being open to other perspectives aimed to expand understanding and helped to free the researcher from preconceived models. Coding and recoding was a continuous process as interviews and transcripts were added to the data set. However, with the inclusion of all planned interview transcripts, additional reorganisation and categorisation was required. The analysis was done in seven phases according to Braun and Clarke (2006) which after the preparatory phase involving data management through NVIVO, included 1) open coding, 2) categorisation of codes, 3) coding on, 4) data reduction, 5) generating analytical memos and writing and 6) data validation, and 7) data synthesising.

**The Preparatory Phase** involves data management procedures. The interview transcripts and audios were imported into NVIVO.

Name	Nodes	References	Created On
Alisa	2085	44794	23/09/2012 12:59 PM
Alisa (2)	1	1	02/11/2013 12:28 PM
Arbnor	539	1478	15/06/2012 12:10 AM
Arbnor(2)	0	0	02/11/2013 12:28 PM
Blendi	687	1913	28/10/2013 7:39 PM
Doni	518	1201	05/11/2013 10:27 PM
Donika	429	1065	28/10/2013 10:16 PM
Engjell	190	481	28/10/2013 10:17 PM
Fiona	386	839	15/06/2012 9:51 PM
Fiona (2)	0	0	02/11/2013 12:28 PM
Iir	680	1963	15/06/2012 9:51 PM
Iirri 2	0	0	02/11/2013 12:28 PM
Jora	640	1852	28/10/2013 10:16 PM
Jorik	384	1002	28/10/2013 10:17 PM
Leka	792	2595	15/06/2012 9:51 PM
Leka 1	0	0	28/10/2013 10:19 PM
Leka 2	0	0	28/10/2013 10:19 PM
Linda	884	3944	15/06/2012 9:50 PM
Linda Audio	0	0	02/11/2013 12:26 PM
Rina	459	1159	28/10/2013 10:16 PM
Rron	551	1349	28/10/2013 7:38 PM
Vlera	771	1914	28/10/2013 10:17 PM
Vlera 2	0	0	28/10/2013 10:17 PM
Yllka	182	444	28/10/2013 10:16 PM

Figure 4 Imported Transcripts and Audios in NVIVO

As seen in figure 3, interviews were inserted as audio files and transcripts. Some interviews were coded in transcripts as separate files and some interviews were coded in transcripts within the audio file. All interviews were created as case nodes. In addition, data from surveys were imported in NVIVO creating automatic classifications, which were linked to cases creating case attributes. This allowed for single case and cross case analysis and visualisation according to attributes.

Name	Type	Created On	Created By	Modified
Survey Classification		15/05/2014 5:55 PM	B. Q	12/02/20
RespondentID	Decimal	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
Pseudonim	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
Workplace	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
Age	Integer	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
Residence	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
Gender	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
What is your marital status	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
How long did you stay abroad	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
When did you come back	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
Currently doing PHD	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
Did you benefit from any of the national or foreign government NGO programmes to work or study abroad	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
Specify the name of the programme	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
What kind of study or training did you complete abroad	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
Master	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
PhD	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
What field of study	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
I had an experience that caused me to question the way I normally act	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
I had an experience that caused me to question my ideas about social roles ( examples of social roles include what a	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
As I questioned my ideas, I realised I no longer agreed with my previous beliefs or role expectations	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
Or instead, as I questioned my ideas, I realised I still agreed with my previous beliefs and role expectations	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
I realized that other people also questioned their beliefs	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
I thought about acting in a different way from my usual beliefs and roles	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		
I felt uncomfortable with traditional social expectations	Text	15/05/2014 6:00 PM		

Figure 5 Case Node Classifications from Survey Responses

Data secured from surveys helped the attribute coding and provided detailed information about prior education, workplace data, marital status, income, reasons for studying abroad, reasons for return, feelings after return, as well as intentions to stay or leave. In addition to this, data from LAS (King, 2009) provided the possibility of identifying whether participants had experienced perspective transformation, and which learning activities had contributed to it (King, 2009). This information helped to create a fuller participant profile and allowed the researcher to compare interview and survey data that had been gathered.

**Table 3 Participants Responses in Learning Activities Regarding Phases and Feelings after Return**

Pseudonym	Q10: Thinking about your educational experience at this institution, check off any statement that may apply	Q15: When compared to the time before you left; do you consider yourself better or worse off since your return?
Engjell	13	Better off than before
Yllka	13	Much better off than before
Alisa	2,8,12	Worse than before
Rron	2	Much better off than before
Rina	2,9	Better off than before
Jora	13	About the same
Blend	2,5,9	Much Worse than before
Leka	2,9	Much better off than before
Arbnor	2,6,8,10	Much better off than before
Jorik	6,10,12	Better off than before
Donika	2	Better off than before
Doni	2	Better off than before
Fiona	2,8,10	Better off than before
Ilir	2,6,8,10	Much better off than before
Linda	1,2,3,5,6,8,9,10,11,12	Much better off than before y
Vlera	13	About the same

Red	Do not identify with phases
Blue	Identify with 1-3 phases
Green	Identify with more than three phases

**Legend:**

1. I had an experience that caused me to question the way I normally act.
2. I had an experience that caused me to question my ideas about social roles (examples of social roles include what a mother or father should do, how an adult should act, how a student should act)
3. As I questioned my ideas, I realised I no longer agreed with my previous beliefs or role expectations
4. Or instead, as I questioned my ideas, I realised I still agreed with my previous beliefs and role expectations
5. I realised that other people also questioned their beliefs
6. I thought about acting in a different way from my usual beliefs and roles
7. I felt uncomfortable with traditional social expectations
8. I tried out new roles so that I would become more comfortable or confident in them
9. I tried to figure out a way to adopt these new ways of acting
10. I gathered the information I needed to adopt to these new ways of acting
11. I began to think about the reactions and feedback from my new behaviour

12. I took action and adopted these new ways of acting
13. I do not identify with any of the statements above
14. Other (please specify)

Survey results were available before conducting interviews and were used to select participants, taking care on selecting cases that both reported phases of transformations and those that did not. From those selected, 11 cases identified with experiences that caused them to question ideas about social roles, although, they did not mention all phases. From those selected, 12 participants reported that they felt much better or better off than before they went to the UK; two participants reported no change; and two participants reported that they felt worse or much worse than before. When these were compared with the reports of the phases, those cases that did not identify with any of the phases also answered that they did not experience any change. Whereas, other cases that identified with one or more phases reported changes for better or for worse. These findings indicated that a deeper analysis was required to understand the transformations, if any, as well as to understand the differences between positive and negative experiences.

Data from ENDNOTE covering literature consulted, with their classifications, articles, as PDF files and reading notes in the form of memos were included in NVIVO. Figure 5 shows a snapshot of some sources included in NVIVO.

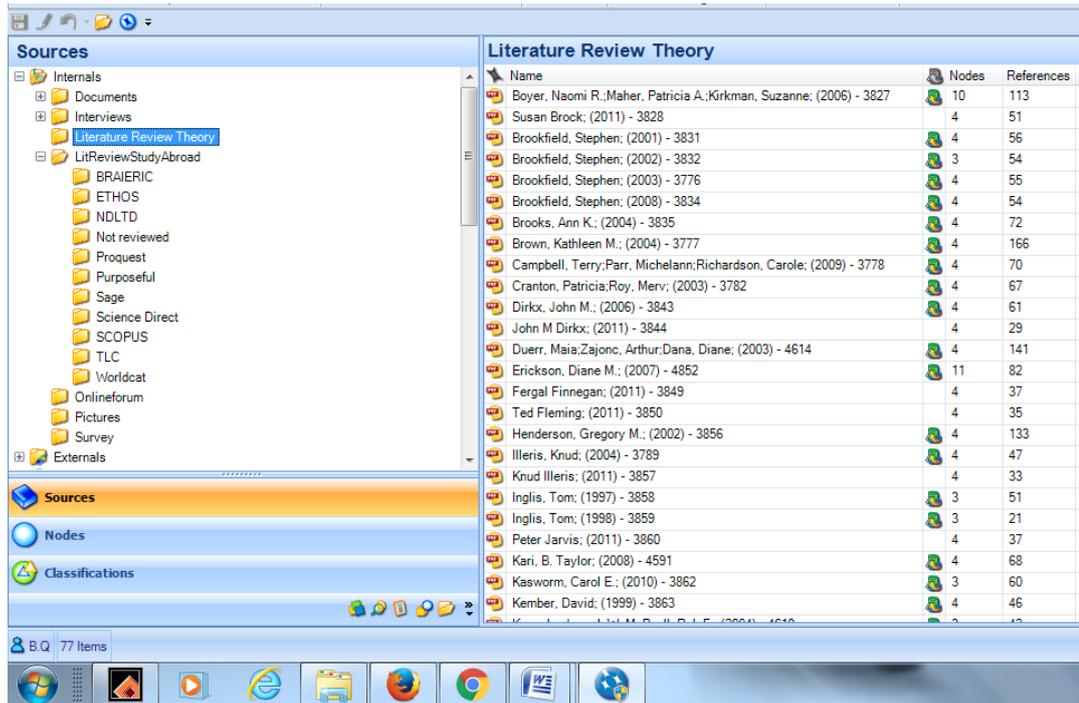


Figure 6 Literature Sources Imported from ENDNOTES with Classifications, PDF and Memos

In addition, literature based codes were also created to enable comparison of findings with resources. Literature on study abroad experience was also auto-coded in order to allow later comparison with the study.

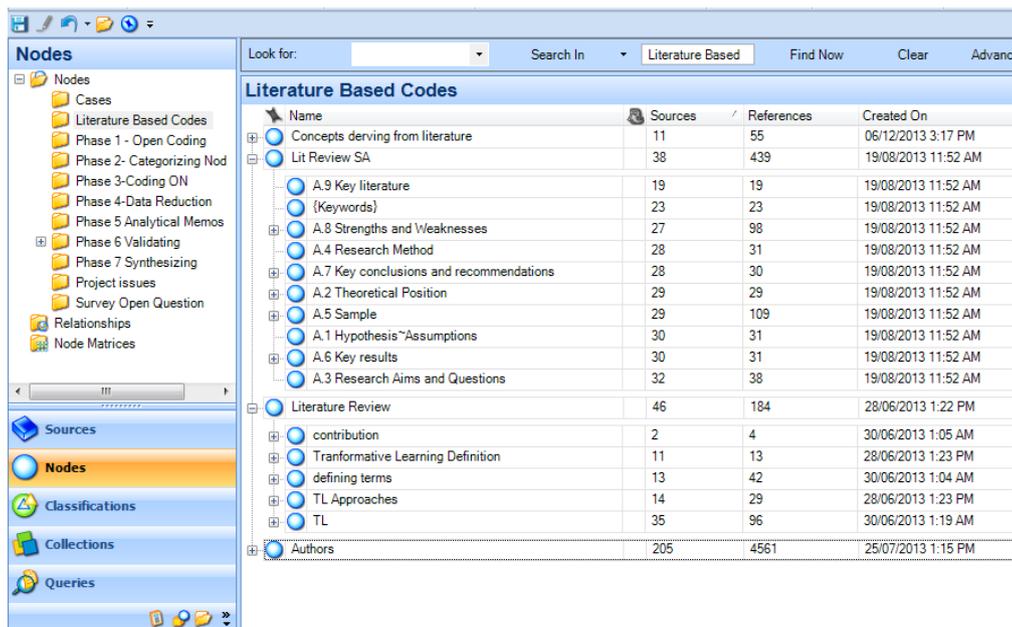


Figure 7. Auto Coding from Literature Notes

**First Phase: Open Coding** included free coding, descriptive coding, process coding, narrative coding and action coding (Saldaña, 2009). Basically, the codes, referred to at the NVIVO projects as nodes, at this stage represented “word or short phrases that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 3). These could be cognitive aspects, emotions and feelings, hierarchical aspects or processes. This strategy moved towards identification of processes and actions in gerundial forms as they were more appropriate to make sense of emotions, actions and processes. These include feeling anxious, feeling insecure, thinking about studying abroad, applying for scholarships, negotiating role. According to Saldaña (2009, p. 109) “narrative analysis is particularly suitable for such studies of identity development, critical/feminist studies, and documentation of the life course.”

The screenshot shows the NVivo software interface for a project named 'Copy project dissertation.nvp'. The 'Media Tools' tab is active, showing playback controls like 'Stop', 'Play / Pause', and 'Playback'. The 'Nodes' list on the left includes 'Phase 1 - Open C'. The main content area displays a table for 'Phase 1 - Open Coding' with columns for Name, Sources, References, and Created On. Below the table is a video player for 'compensating lost time' by 'Blendi', with a transcript showing two entries:

Name	Sources	References	Created On
gaining independence from family	1	1	18/05/2014
changing perspective on the collective	1	1	18/05/2014
changing intentions	1	1	18/05/2014
strengthening confidence	1	1	18/05/2014
strengthening competences	1	1	18/05/2014
strengthening gender beliefs	1	3	18/05/2014

Timespan	Content	speaker
35	<b>B: There weren't many options. You have to watch and learn, and of course if others needed 3 or 5 hours to learn that, I had to invest 7-8 hours a day to "catch" something which the for the others was simple.</b>	Blendi
36	<b>B: You said it was systemic, did you find that others from Kosovo were going through the same processes...</b>	Bardha

The interface also shows a status bar at the bottom with 'B.Q 1183 Items', 'Nodes: 691', 'References: 1927', and an 'Editable' icon.

Figure 8 Open Coding Example

**Second Phase: Categorisation of Codes.** Codes representing a word or phrase (free coding) identified in phase one were grouped into meaningful parent and child nodes called containers. For example, Activating Events were categorised as related to cultural, individual, institutional, physical and relationship dimensions.

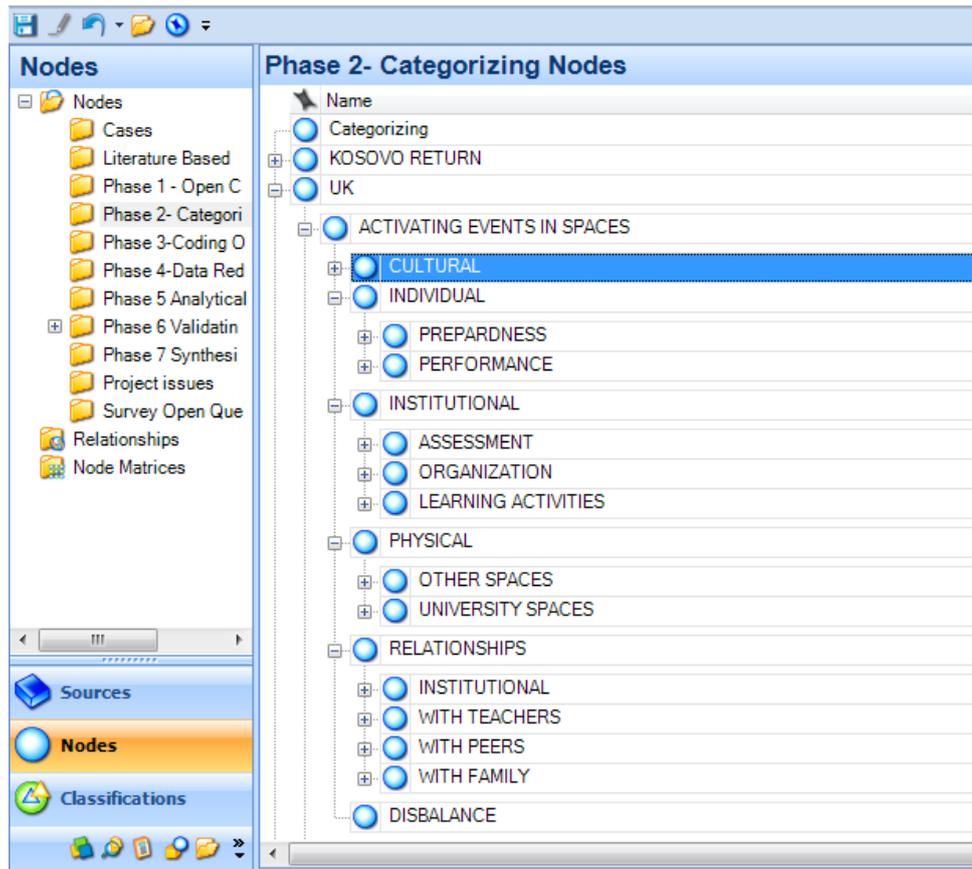


Figure 9 Categorisation of Codes into Parent and Child Nodes

In addition to this, each code was assigned an activating event attribute “Negative” with red colour and “Positive” with green colour.

UK	21	1150	27/ 08/ 2012 9:58 PM	
ACTIVATING EVENTS IN SPACES	18	480	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
CULTURAL	10	22	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
DISBALANCE	1	1	05/ 04/ 2014 12:15 AM	
INDIVIDUAL	12	160	24/ 04/ 2014 7:46 PM	
PERFORMANCE	11	94	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
PREPARDNESS	9	66	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
expressin lack of any training in research methods	3	4	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
feeling ashamed	1	1	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
feeling confortable with discipline and information	1	1	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
feeling confortable with education style	1	1	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
feeling dissapointed (2)	2	2	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
feeling equal	3	5	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
feeling inferior (2)	4	4	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
feeling pressured	2	2	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
feeling that previous knowledge was not grounded	2	3	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
feeling unpreaped for such studies	2	2	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
felling that previous knowledge was superficial	3	4	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
having doubts in education received in Kosovo	2	9	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
having no problems with writing	2	3	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
having realistic expectations	2	3	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
not haveing the right experience	1	1	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	
not knowing authors mentioned in lectures	2	3	04/ 04/ 2014 3:01 PM	

Figure 10 Coding with activating Event Attributes as Negative (Red) and Positive (Green)

The dimensions positive and negative assisted later analysis to determine which type of disharmony was experienced as positive or negative.

**Third Phase: Coding On** involved categorising, re-naming and re-grouping into identified categories. At this stage the codes are placed in the theoretical framework and levels of coding are closely observed.

Name	Sources	References
SHAPING LEARNING IDENTITIES	18	1134
FACTORS	11	59
PROCESS OF IDENTITY SHAPING	15	391
SPACES OF IDENTITY SHAPING	16	653
INTEGRATING IDENTITY ACCROS SPACES	18	315
VALIDATING IDENTITY	10	82
INTEGRATING IDENTITY	14	178
NEGOTIATING IDENTITY	15	51
SHIFTING IDENTITIES	21	934
differnces between pedgaogies and practices	1	1
BECOMING AND OVERCOMING THROUGH BRIDGING	15	96
ENCOUNTERING DISHARMONY IN INTERACTION	18	352
EXPLORING SELVES IN INTERACTION	19	475

Figure 11 Creation of Thematic Categories

**Phase 4: Data Reduction** aimed at refining themes and storylines and generating clear definitions and names for each theme. The NVIVO file was converted to the NVIVO 11 version, which allowed coding comparison and further visualisation.

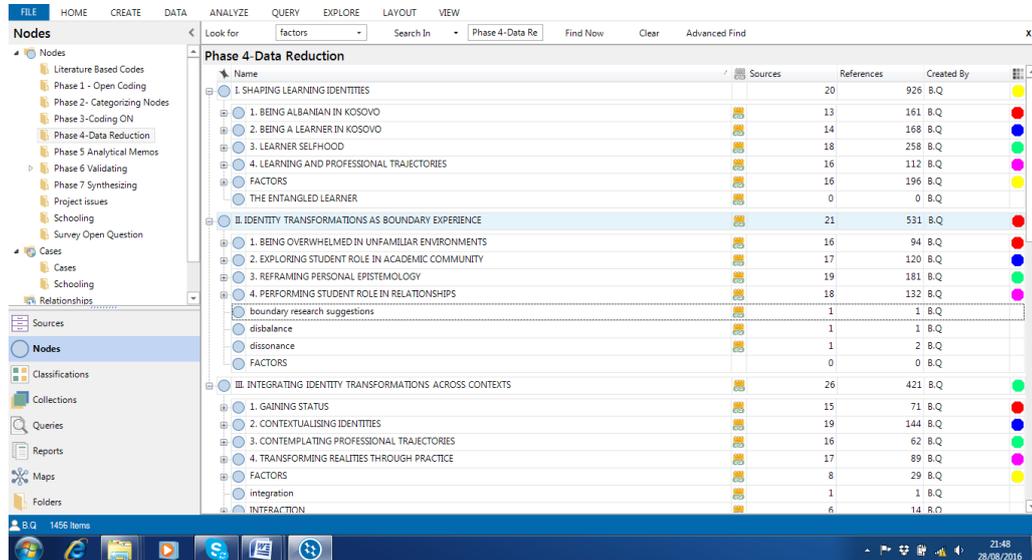


Figure 12 Categories Created from Data Reduction Strategies

The data reduction phase involved code refinement based on exploration and visualisation techniques. For example, identity work at the boundaries could be analysed to see which dimensions coded for each participant.

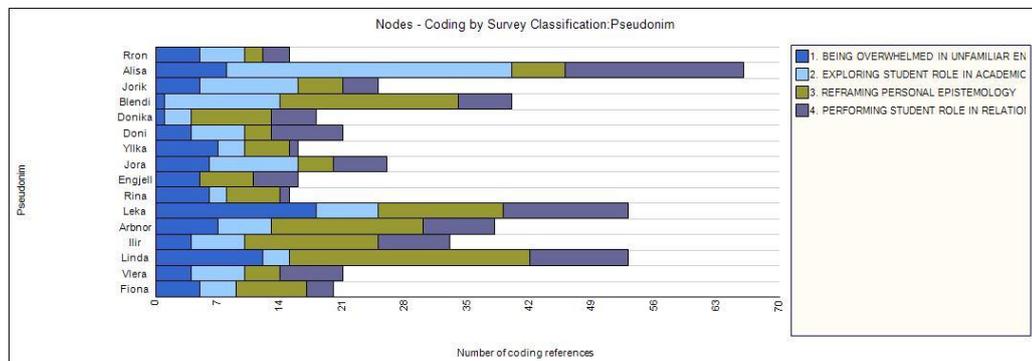


Figure 13 Identity Transformation at the Boundaries Categories According to Coding Reference

**Phase 5: Generating Analytical Memos and Writing.** Although memos are written throughout the process, analytical memos include clarification of concepts and relationships between concepts. For example Table 3 below presents how the subcategory *being overwhelmed* was developed into a conceptual map.

**Table 4 Concept Map for Subcategory Being Overwhelmed**

What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequence
Being overwhelmed involves feelings of surprise, stress, and powerful emotions related to the experience of events, spaces and resources.	During their first encounters	At the University buildings	Because they feel detached from usual	By comparing with spaces at home	Needing to adapt to the environment and institutional practices
	During settling	In class	Because they feel insecure	By realising differences	
	During classes	At the library	Because they feel depressed	By realising limitations	
	During shopping	In the city	Because they fear problems	By realising new opportunities	
	During registration	In the dormitory	Because of the problems with language	By feeling at the centre	
	During instruction	In the country	Because they fear success	By attributing differences to their previous education	
	During consultation		Because they feel stress	By feeling free	
	During preparatory course		Because they feel overwhelmed	By realising challenges	
	During first months (1-3)		Because they feel labelled		
			Because of the intensive dynamic		
		Because they are impressed		Feeling valuable	
		Because they are surprised			
		Because of the supportive administration			
		Because of the international environment			

At this stage, concept maps were developed for each category and subcategory and single case and cross case analysis was conducted. The experience of the narratives was reproduced in case memos for each participant: single case table and cross case table. While the findings and discussion chapters were written, clarification was sought through linking data, models and concepts. Different data presentation models were experimented with at this stage.

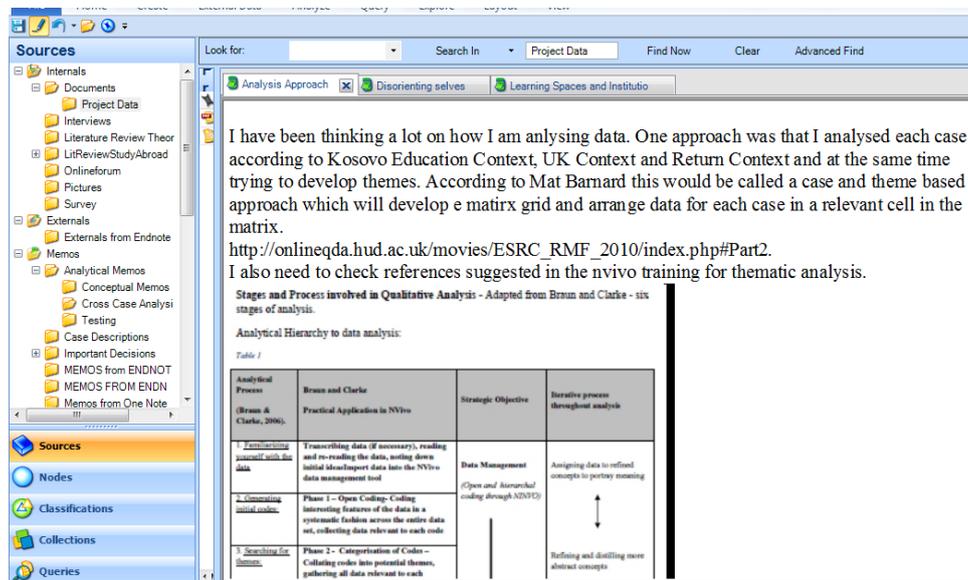


Figure 14 Example of Memo Regarding the Analysis Approach

**Phase 6: Data Validation.** This process included inspection of coding and interpretation. Data inspection and validation facilitated the

presentation and interpretation of findings, grounded in data. For example, through visualisation, data were checked if all participants had coded references for nodes, percentage covered and also frequency for nodes. This audit prompted checking transcripts and interpreting deviant cases. Queries were also run to check differences according to gender, age, and other attributes.

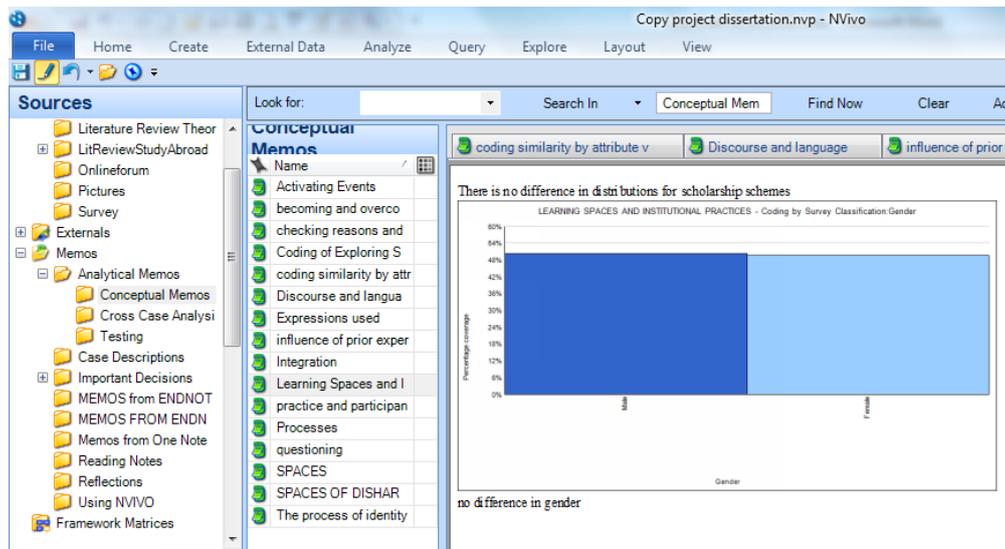


Figure 15 Testing Coding for Gender

**Phase 7: Final Synthesising.** This phase is combined with writing and re-writing as well as making decisions for data presentation techniques in the dissertation. Data, quotations and findings were checked to analyse if research questions were addressed and to ensure that data reporting and conclusion drawing relate back to the literature. Data presentation and discussion were done according to the model presented by (Burnard et al., 2008), where findings and discussions are reported together according to the main themes. Therefore three chapters, Shaping Learner Identities, Transforming Identities at the Boundaries and Integrating Identity Transformations across Contexts present findings illustrated with quotes and other visual aids while incorporating the discussion.

***Ethical Issues***

The main ethical issue with this research is the risk of identification of participants, due to life story and demographic characteristics. Members of the targeted community know each other, and the interviewer and the interviewees in most of the cases also know each other. Moreover, participants' status, position, innovations, participation in public discourse and change implementation is highly recognisable. Although informed consent covers in detail all issues concerned within the research, two main strategies have been used to protect participants: masking and approval.

The masking strategy involves changing characteristics of participants. According to Walford(2005), the use of pseudonyms does not guarantee protection if there are possible identification elements of the research site. Besides using pseudonyms, the researcher changed some characteristics of participants, such as gender, age, field of study and residence.<sup>47</sup> In addition, because the workplace was the most sensitive identification aspect, the researcher also hid or masked workplace information by omitting identification details.

The second strategy used was the approval strategy. The researcher sent case description memos to participants for approval when they were used as sample case descriptions to be included in the report. In cases of suspected risk of identification in citations used by the participants, the researcher sent citations to participants for approval. In this way, the researcher assured participants in the study that they were protected and provided possibilities to maintain contact and interest of participants for other member checking strategies.

Another important ethical aspect was using common knowledge and experience of the researcher and interviewees in seeking clarifications

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<sup>47</sup> I acknowledge that Masking Strategy was suggested by John Dirx from Michigan University in the presentation of my preliminary results in a paper submitted in the Transformative Learning Conference in San Francisco in 2012.

during the interview process. Participants were careful in the third phase of the interview (reintegration in the workplace) and revealed their experiences in the workplace or elsewhere through metaphors. This signalled the researcher that there could be more than was said, which led to probing techniques or stopping the audio recording to elicit more information or finish up the interview. This involved careful listening and note taking after the conversation, as well as further approval if that information was to be used in the research report.

### **Conclusions**

This chapter has justified the research design and method as well as explained the data collection and analysis procedures, including the ethical issues involved in these procedures. The chapter highlighted complex processes in data analysis involving data management methods and data analysis phases through which findings and conclusions were derived. The data documentation and analysis in NVIVO provided a rigorous approach to test and validate data reporting and a practical tool to contain project data, literature, survey, memos, tables and concept maps in one place.

## **CHAPTER 5: SHAPING LEARNER IDENTITIES**

This chapter explores the shaping of learner identities through examining learning experiences of 16 Kosovan participants as Albanians and as learners in Kosovo before pursuing postgraduate studies in the UK. Participants represent both genders, and share Albanian ethnicity, middle class background and Muslim religion, with two exceptions (one catholic Albanian, one participant of mixed Albanian Bosnian ethnicity). Participants share experiences of long-term conflict and transition in Kosovo and their learning experiences include the circumstances between the years 1978 to 2009 and the learning conditions prevailing in different school/university settings and programmes in which they studied. The chapter focuses on the broader context, where participants engage in learning experiences as Albanians and as learners in Kosovo, thus excluding the discussion of gender, class and religion in the analysis.

The broader context in which learners and learning spaces are situated and shaped consists of historical, social, cultural, political and economic conditions (Bourdieu, 1985, Tennant, 2012, Osguthorpe, 2006, Ecclestone, 2007). According to Bourdieu (1985,p.66), social space is a multidimensional construction in which economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital is differentiated and distributed. However, according to Ecclestone(2007), the consequences of the broader context and structural dimensions of social space on identity construction and agency are depoliticised by concentrating on structural factors such as class, gender, race, economic and material condition(Ecclestone, 2007, p. 122). By politicising the broader context, the chapter explores how being Albanian and being a learner in Kosovo is constructed in disadvantaged educational, social and political circumstances that shape learner beliefs, attitudes and practices through activities, the culture and learning situations (Jehng et al., 1993).

Importantly, learners are active in shaping their learning identity and potential. Shaping entails agentic engagement with learning situations

which are multiple and life-long. Learning potential describes the capacity of the learner to learn, or the reservoir of abilities with potential to be activated (Feuerstein 1979 in Hobbs, 1980). According to Feuerstein, with the exception of cases with impairments, the human organism has the capacity to modify cognitive structures, provided that they are engaged in developmentally positive learning situations (Feuerstein 1979 in Hobbs, 1980). Agency and effort on the part of learners are important when interacting with learning situations (Osguthorpe, 2006). Therefore, learners play an important role in overcoming constraining situations and in pursuing development goals.

Participants' education profile according to the periods and types of schools and programmes they studied in Kosovo are presented in table 4.

**Table 5** Participants' formal education by year of completion for each level, type of school and field of study

Pseudonym	Primary	Secondary	Type	HE/BA	HE/MA
Alisa	1997	2001	Gymnasium	2005	
Arbnor	1997	2001	Gymnasium	2004	
Blend	1989	1994	Gymnasium	2003	
Doni	1996	1998	Gymnasium	2004	
Donika	1999	2003	Gymnasium	2008	
Engjell	1992	1994	Gymnasium	2003	
Fiona	2003	2007	International K12	2009	
Iir	1997	2001	Gymnasium	2004	
Jora	1987	1991	Gymnasium	2000	
Jorik	1992	1998	Gymnasium	2002	
Leka	1992	1996	Gymnasium	2007	
Linda	1986	1990	Gymnasium	1994	2000
Rina	1990	1994	Gymnasium	1998	
Rron	1993	1997	Gymnasium	2006	
Vlera	1996	2000	Gymnasium	2006	
Yllka	2001	2005	Gymnasium	2008	
	<b>Legend</b>				
	<b>Period 2</b>	<b>1968-1980 Education as Emancipation</b>			
	<b>Period 3</b>	<b>1981-1999 Education as Struggle and Survival</b>			
	<b>Period 4</b>	<b>2000-2016 Education as Transformation</b>			
		<b>Public</b>			
		<b>Private</b>			

Table 4, drawing from the classified periods in Chapter 2: Kosovo Educational Landscape, indicates that 14 participants attended primary school in the third period (classified in table 4 as education as struggle and survival), only two participants attended part of primary school between 1968-1980 (classified in table 4 as education as emancipation) and only 2

participants attended secondary school in the third period (classified in table 4 as education as transformation). Nine participants completed secondary school in the third period, and five of them have attended part of their secondary school in the third period while two of them have completed the secondary school in the third period. Five participants completed university studies in the third period and twelve participants completed university studies in the fourth period after the war. Thus, the narratives about educational experiences in Kosovo for participants in this study mostly cover the period of conflict and transition in the Kosovan society.

In terms of programmes, all participants have attended gymnasiums and completed bachelor studies in social sciences. Included are four participants who quit computer engineering and architecture and one participant who attended two high schools and two universities at the same time. Four participants attended programmes supported by international aid and two participants completed university studies at private colleges. The participation profile can be explained by the study abroad scholarship criteria that mainly attracted young Kosovans who participated in postgraduate programmes in the UK in the field of social and behavioural sciences.

The chapter is organised in four sections to explain participants' learner identity shaping prior to their study abroad experience in the UK. These categories represent collective and individual identities in entanglement with internal and external influences. These are:

- 1) Being Albanian in Kosovo
- 2) Being a Learner in Kosovo
- 3) Learner Selfhood
- 4) Learning and Professional Trajectories

### **Being Albanian in Kosovo**

*Being Albanian in Kosovo* represents the ethnic identification influenced by learning experience within the embedded social, political and

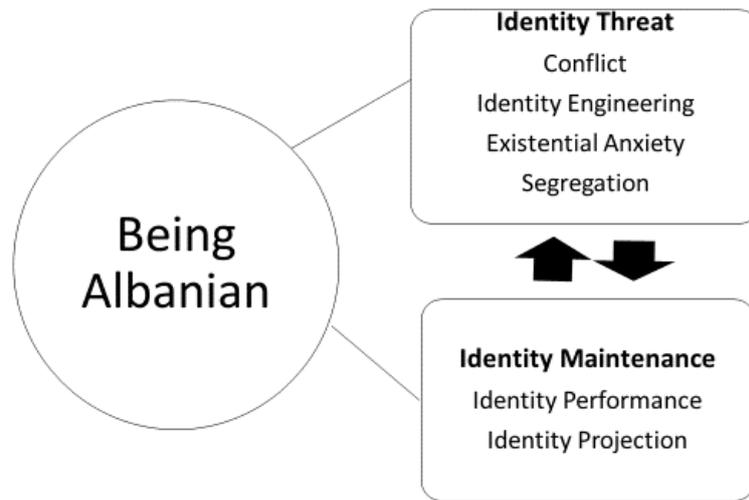
cultural context. It is argued here that ethnic behaviour is developed over time and space in institutions such as family and school through what is mainly referred to as parental and educational teaching and learning activities. For Albanians in Kosovo, as argued in Chapter 2: Kosovo Education Landscape, education was a key factor in developing and maintaining ethnic identity. Ethnic identification is realised through self-identification, identification by others and by the performance of ethnic identity in interactions. Social circumstances, referring to events happening in the social space within which participants have limited control, may significantly influence how ethnic identity is constructed and experienced. For example, although ethnicity is relatively salient (Phinney, 1990), when social circumstances change, ethnic identity may be negotiated and reshaped. As Jenkins (2004, p.43) contends, “Identification by others has consequences”. In this way, it is different to be Albanian in different periods in Kosovo, as this identity is negotiated over time. Therefore, *Being Albanian in Kosovo* refers to the experience of ethnic identity and identification consequences in participants’ learning experiences.

. *Being Albanian* in the territory of Kosovo<sup>48</sup> affected not only participants’ social status and schooling, but also their life experience. Because of their ethnic status, the twelve participants in the study were compelled to become refugees during 1999 and three others emigrated before 1999. All sixteen participants in this study experienced two major schooling interruptions, each of more than five months. During the 1990s, three participants dropped out of school because of economic difficulties their families faced resulting from ethnically discriminatory job expulsion policies. All 16 participants experienced political segregation and/or expulsion to underground education premises. Consequently, *Being Albanian* is entangled with learning experiences while at the same time being influenced by that experience. Conflict influenced overall wellbeing and contributed to *identity threat*, which in turn activated *identity maintenance*. The interaction between identity threat and identity

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<sup>48</sup> Kosovo declared independence in 2008

maintenance is illustrated in Fig. 15, which presents subcategories of *Being Albanian in Kosovo*.



**Figure 16 Being Albanian in Kosovo**

***Conflict and Identity Threat***

Participant narratives reveal how conflict had threatened their identity in terms of ethnic identity experience and ethnic segregation, and how ethnic status affected their wellbeing, access to resources, their learning experience and learner identity. For example, Alisa and Don explain how they were affected by the political situation in which they lived during the nineties:

*“When I look back at this period I remember that it was a period when I had many dreams, dreams similar to every adolescent. Life as it was here and life as we saw it through the media (although very limited for us) was very different. Ours was very limited. Life out there seemed attractive and more relaxed in contrast to what we were going through: repression. As a young person, of course, you live that experience maybe differently from adults. I lived in anxiety all the time because of the situation. Lack of security and peace made me wish I could go away from here and change something in my life.”*

(Interview with Alisa, 2012)

*My generation did not have an easy childhood, adolescence and schooling. I would not prefer to mention all my experiences during the conflict but in a way they have influenced directly each and every one of us. Elementary school was a period between the difficulties of my family to educate us, and the opportunity to overcome those difficulties being amongst other children.*

(Interview with Don, 2013)

Being Albanian during the conflict in Kosovo affected their experiences, resulting in insecurity, unhappiness and unfulfilled dreams. Alisa's narrative illustrates the feeling of relentless anxiety and its impact on her experience of youth. She compares and contrasts her experience through the projected experiences of youth seen in the media or through other sources. Similarly, Don explains his experience as a struggle to survive economically and through joint participation. Both describe identity threat resulting from their experience of conflict as a constraint.

In the case of Rina, the only participant in this study with mixed ethnicity (Albanian and Bosnian)<sup>49</sup>; ethnic identification is experienced differently in different situations. She explains:

*"I was different from the other children perhaps because I have a mixed ethnic background. We were more exposed, if I may say so, I read materials in the Serbian language and in English. This has probably distinguished me from the other students of my generation...Although Kosovo faced a period that was difficult for all of us because of the regime. I remember elementary school with much pleasure. Probably,*

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<sup>49</sup>According to Phinney, J. S. (1990) 'Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: review of research', *Psychological Bulletin*, 108(3), 499 ethnicity is determined by "one's parents' ethnic group or country of origin". Subjects are considered as members of an ethnic group if two parents belong to the same group. If a person has parents from different ethnic groups than he/she is classified as mixed or bi-ethnic.

*high school was a bit difficult for us- this was the time when we attended Albanian school in private houses.”*

(Interview with Rina, 2012)

Before the dissolution of Yugoslavia, having mixed ethnicity did not matter due to the primary identification as Yugoslav. In her narrative above, Rina describes a change from the time she experienced school as being a “pleasure” before the conflict, to the time she experienced school as being “difficult” during the conflict. She re-negotiates her identity in new circumstances, where identity threat results from her ethnic status as Albanian and Bosnian.<sup>50</sup> Her primary identification as Albanian situates her in the Albanian schools within the underground parallel education system.

Similarly, in her experience of emigration, Vlera explains identity threat of involuntary emigration resulting from conflict in Kosovo:

*“Being a refugee had a great impact on me. I lived 10 months in X country with the thought of how I was going to spend 2 months in Prishtina [Capital of Kosovo]. I was only physically present there [X country]. Fortunately, I have been able to keep my peace throughout.”*

(Interview with Vlera, 2012)

Vlera as an emigrant attended a Catholic school in X country in a foreign language. She could enjoy security and better schooling conditions, yet at the same time, she participated in religious rituals with which she did not identify. Although she did not practice her Muslim faith, she refused to take Catholic religious classes. Even when she participated in religious rituals, she accepted them as “general religious rituals from which anybody could learn something”. Feeling homesick and lack of belonging may be interpreted as identity threat because of the psychological stress she was

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<sup>50</sup> During this period there was a war in Bosnia

enduring. Being Albanian is re-constructed with being a foreigner and with possibilities of starting another life in a foreign country.

All participants experienced segregation by attending school in late or night shifts and by moving to other improvised locations and walking longer distances to schools. These circumstances caused reduced class hours, teacher replacements, lack of books and learning materials and an increase in dropout rates<sup>51</sup>. Even after the war, in Northern Kosovo where conflict persists, learners were displaced from their own schools because of the ethnic division.

*The teaching hours and the schedule were short. We went to school in shifts. Elementary school pupils went to school until 12 o'clock, the gymnasium's shift started at 2.00 or 3.00 until 6 o'clock. There were also problems in providing the teachers/professors for certain courses. They made replacements... a professor who wasn't relevant to the course covered certain courses...My generation had the chance to finish the first part of the gymnasium before 1999, and the second half after 1999. The biggest misfortune in Mitrovica was that when I finished high school, the gymnasium building was still used by KFOR<sup>52</sup> troops. Again, we continued the second part of high school by going at the same elementary school building.*

(Interview with Doni, 2012)

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<sup>51</sup> See the documentary video homes as schools to have an idea of how schools were organised [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=MN66IJsA3UU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=MN66IJsA3UU)

<sup>52</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organisation ( NATO) Mission of Kosovo Forces(KFOR) established with United Nations Security Council <http://www.aco.nato.int/resources/site7423/General/Documents/unscr1199.pdf>

*In our elementary school in “Dardania”, the school building was separated in two parts, The Albanian and the Serb part. The labs belonged to the Serbians. We always lacked lab work. We never knew what a lab would look like, therefore we had to imagine for ourselves how the chemical reactions happened, the experiments, etc.*

(Interview with Donika. 2012)

The majority of participants perceive that the circumstances in which they lived during the conflict have limited their learning experiences and affected their wellbeing. Exposure to extreme situations, such as long-term conflicts and war, threatened identity experience by changing life situations and opportunities. The consequences of being Albanian affected how learners experienced youth and school. The experience of conflict and war represents a state of ‘liminality’ (Turner, 1967) in which political circumstances threaten identity and places participants in a marginal space between their past and their ambiguous future.

#### ***Conflict and Identity Maintenance***

The findings suggest that when faced with identity threat, identity resistance plays an important role in identity maintenance. The participant narratives of experience of conflict in Kosovo reveal how they used identity resistance tactics, such as identity performance and identity projection in response to identity threat (Jenkins, 2008).

In Linda’s narrative about her experience with Albanian identity performance in her assignments at school in the eighties, she recounts using symbols that represented both her own experience of her identity and identity as promoted by the school.

*“Well, for example, the topic of the essay I won a prize for in the Yugoslav competition was about the ideology of that time, about brotherhood and how good it feels to be a Yugoslav. However, I had a gift that I was always able to include*

*elements of the national identity and hide them at the same time. I remember very well one sentence I wrote:*

*In this land, the red blood mixed with black earth gave birth to freedom flowers (poppy flowers).*

*The sentence had two meanings: red was for freedom and symbolised the Socialist system and the Communists. The requirements were to write in descriptive and emotional style to express those values promoted by the ideology. For me, red and black symbolised the Albanian flag and that everyone who dies for the Albanian cause generates a new potential to continue the fight.”*

(Interview with Linda, 2012)

Linda’s narrative expresses her dualistic identity performance. One performance reflects the school and the prevailing political ideology and one performance reflects Albanian identity through a “hidden transcript” referring to Scott’s (1990, p. 4) idea of “off stage” discourse, when using red and black to symbolise the Albanian flag and the Albanian struggle. The Albanian identity, although threatened by school policy, is maintained through symbolic expression as a resistance tactic.

Ethnic identification is problematic when learners perform dualistic identities. The tension between learners’ national Albanian identity and the Yugoslav identity promoted at school is illustrated with the essay topic “spring in my town”. This standard essay topic was given to all elementary and high school students. The essay’s aim was to describe changes that happen in nature and in peoples’ and animals’ lives in the spring, using a descriptive style. Research participants recounted how they used to portray political changes that typically happened in Kosovo during springtime, such as protests and popular unrest, while using symbols used for describing nature.

*“Spring in my city [laughing]. It was required to be related to the socio, economic and political situation. I am always emphasising this because it mattered. In the sense that you had to be patriotic and at the same time you had to use symbols to hide that.”*

(Interview with Alisa, 2012)

These examples show how teachers contributed to the maintenance of Albanian identity by encouraging students to write with symbolic expressions and at the same time respect the official school curriculum. This implies a communal resistance against the ‘engineered’ identity promoted by the education system; an identity that was not internalised. The Albanian identity was a joint project of pupils, teachers, and their families. Hidden resistance tactics became part of their everyday practice because of the importance of schooling for learners’ future prospects. In terms of the processes of identity shaping, this represents an identity resistance tactic employed within the circumstances during the eighties.

However, with the escalation of conflict in the nineties and the expulsions of Albanian pupils and students from schools, research participants, who were attending schools organised in the Parallel Education System (PES) at that time, expressed their Albanian identity through open resistance tactics such as protests. As Rron narrates:

*“It was a bitter experience for us, especially for me because I liked school very much. Therefore, when we had six months without going to school we didn’t know what else to do. What are we going to do now if we don’t go to school? This was a difficult experience, and learning wasn’t easy. ...University studies started with the students’ protests in October. The first year of studies or the first student experience for us was about the protests.”*

(Interview with Rron, 2012)

Attending schools in the Parallel Education System was a response to the identity threat resulting from expulsion and segregation. Protests for education became part of most of the participants' experiences. Within the turmoil of conflict, participants view school as playing an important role in maintaining their learning identity. For example, Rina and Rron reveal:

*The conditions were quite bad. We had to be at school by 7 o'clock in the morning in order to reserve a seat where you could sit properly. We didn't have any chairs or desks, we only had those improvised desks made from 2 bricks and one board. We sat on them.... ... I may say that probably because we were expelled from the school buildings teachers and students were mobilised [to engage in education]. We learned a lot. I know that I studied 5 to 6 hours a day.*

(Interview with Rina, 2012)

*Maybe those very difficult conditions made us love school even more and appreciate going to school and the whole experience.*

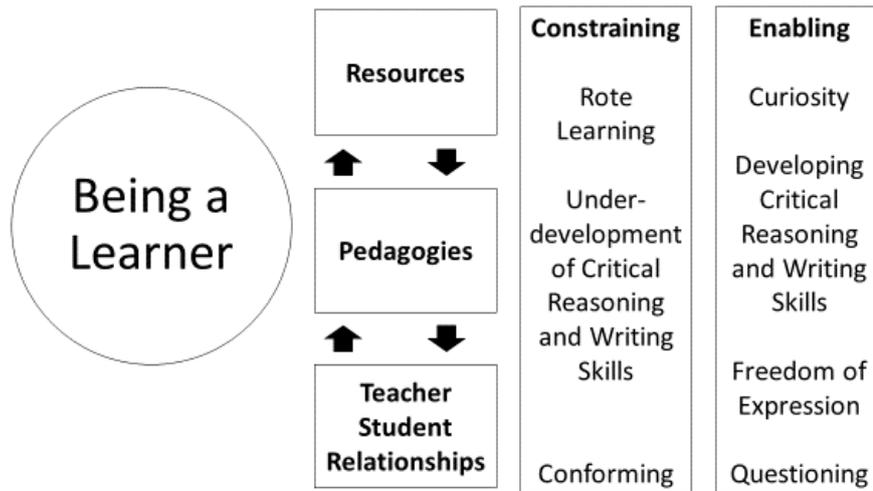
(Interview with Rron, 2012)

The narratives could be interpreted as persistence to maintain normality even when nothing is normal or certain. In times of violence and fear, participating in everyday activities is considered resistance in an attempt to maintain some sort of normality. When identity and wellbeing are threatened by political conflicts, acts of violence and segregation, the identity is maintained through hidden or open resistance tactics, depending on the circumstances. The narratives presented here describe resilient learners who struggle to maintain their ethnic identity and value time they spent in school, despite difficulties resulting from conflict. Being Albanian is entangled with their experiences of being a learner in Kosovo.

### **Being a Learner in Kosovo**

*Being a learner in Kosovo* explains the entanglement of the learner with *communities of practice* (Wenger, 1999) referring to learning experiences that include all elements and conditions of learning situations: physical (learning resources), content (curriculum), learning processes (pedagogies) and social (the relationships between students and teachers). Learning experiences are situated and as such, they may enable or constrain members' learning potential participating in the community. Learning potential is activated or constrained by learning situations and learner relationship with learning, thus it does not convey a deficiency dimension but rather an activity dimension implying a reciprocal relationship between the learner and the environment (Feuerstein 1979 in Hobbs, 1980). Although this study does not measure learning potential in any way, the findings suggest that learning experiences may have constraining and enabling impacts, thus affecting learner identity.

In this analysis, dimensions of learning experiences are grouped in two categories: 1) Constraining Learning Experiences and 2) Enabling Learning Experiences representing perceived impacts of resources, pedagogies and student-teacher relationships on participants' learner potential and learning outcomes. The subcategories of Being a Learner are illustrated in Figure 16.



**Figure 17 Being a Learner in Kosovo**

### *Constraining Learning Experiences*

The prevailing participant accounts perceived resources, pedagogies and student teacher relationships as constraining their potential. Constraining resources are associated with physical conditions of schools, labs, and learning materials. Constraining pedagogies are reported as rote learning emphasis, lack of practical skills being taught (critical reading, reasoning and writing) and conforming behaviour. The prevailing experience of participants describes relationships with teachers as authoritative and unsupportive, creating a climate in which there was a lack of freedom to request assistance, to express concerns or ideas which resulted in constrained learner potential.

All participants experienced deteriorating schooling conditions which they describe as “bad”, “inappropriate”, “difficult”, “limiting” and “with large classes”. The combination of inadequate school infrastructure and lack of books appears to have affected student learning.

*There were these main school books from which we learned. But the literature after the eighth grade wasn't complete. Of course, the physical facilities influence the teaching and*

*learning process. It was quite traditional teaching. We were 35 students in class. Most of the time we lacked books.*

(Interview with Don, 2012)

*I had study problems because of the literature. I could not understand it. Books were translated and you could not make any sense of them.*

(Interview with Blend, 2012)

*While on one hand, the infrastructure was not impressive, we had very few books. The internet wasn't available, therefore research was very limited and you could only rely on the books and on the scripts which the students have used during the past years.*

(Interview with Vlera, 2012)

Lack of books is reported by participants to be particularly limiting in higher education. In addition, they also criticised the quality of the books or their translations. Blend and Vlera describe conditions and reading resources at the university even after the war as limiting their potential. Participants' narratives confirm reports that learning from a single resource to pass exams remained a standard, but limiting, practice (Thaqi, 2009). It is argued here that lack of appropriate infrastructure and resources affected education and consequently shaped pedagogies.

The majority of the participants experienced what they refer to as “learning by heart”, “reciting”, “mimicking” and “memorising”. As Ilir reveals:

*Well you had to reproduce the material in question in the way it was stated by the author. Your opinion was evaluated*

*positively, but it did not matter in evaluation. What mattered was if you remembered what was said exactly in the book. So there was no stimulation to encourage critical thinking and fulfilment of curiosity. It was not requested that we analyse things or discuss about things.*

(Interview with Ilir, 2012)

Pedagogies as described by Ilir are interpreted as banking pedagogies (Freire, 1970). ‘Banking’ pedagogies constrain learning potential by limiting the questioning practices and critical reasoning. Although learners noticed other interpretations or problematic interpretations, they had to reproduce the exact text given in the book or dictated by the teacher, even when the material was not understood. This promoted memorising without understanding, which may be interpreted as superficial learning.

Participants perceived practical skills such as critical reasoning, writing and reading skills, as the weakest points in the education system in Kosovo. They reveal that writing was not a common activity, with the exception of the Albanian language subject.

*In high school essays were not structured, they were more of a descriptive nature. There was no argumentative writing at all throughout four years of faculty [university studies]. Even in high school, we only wrote essays or literature reports in the Albanian Language Subject. So we did not write essays for history, or any other subject.*

(Interview with Linda, 2012)

Lack of writing practices in formal education may constrain the development of ‘writing skills as a means of thinking’. For example, Kellogg and Raulerson(2007) suggest that writing transforms experience, requiring cognitive control over the writing process (planning, writing and

reviewing) and access to working memory resources. According to Kellogg and Raulerson(2007, p. 238) it requires at least a decade of practice and training for writing to become similar to a means of thinking. The findings suggest that limited writing practice has constrained participant expression and later academic performance.

Leka further illustrates the link of writing skills with critical reading and reasoning to explain how they shaped academic standards in a community of practice.

**B:** *What do you mean?*

**L:** *We have many “holes” [gaps] in the education system, or in the way, we use our knowledge?*

**B:** *What do you mean? You were one of the best students.*

**L:** *One of the best students in the system. I was lacking writing skills, even reading culture. Being critical of what I’m reading or saying.*

(Interview with Leka, 2012)

The “system” as interpreted by Leka refers to the “communities of practice” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 2000, p. 229) in which critical reading and writing was not emphasised. According to Wenger (Wenger, 2000, p. 229), “communities of practice” as a social learning system represent defined competencies in particular social contexts. Knowing is experienced as competencies in the social community in which personal experience and standards of competence are not always congruent, but shape and reshape each other through interaction (Wenger, 2000, p. 226). However, as writing and critical reasoning were not a requirement in Kosovo, the majority of participants did not question the requirements prior to their study abroad experience.

With some exceptions, participants describe their learning experience at the university in relationship with teachers as “not benefiting from lectures,” “not heard,” “limited,” and “not challenging”. In addition,

they describe the majority of professors as “distant,” “not caring,” and “authoritative”.

*There was a professor who taught two courses at the same time and in exam term, I had submitted both of them. On the exam day, the professor didn't show up and I went to the cafeteria of the university and I told him, “Today we have an exam with you” He replied: “We will postpone it for Saturday.” I said, “On Saturday we have another exam with you.” He replied, “So you think you're that smart that you can pass both exams for one semester huh?” This surprised me a lot and I was very discouraged, instead of saying well done you have submitted both exams it is good even to try passing both of them and even if you fail it is something that happens in life.*

(Interview with Vlera, 2012)

*I never had any kind of appropriate learning system. This is because, in order to learn something, I first had to build a logical structure of what the material contained and some kind of logical flow. This actually presented a problem for professors, as they required that we memorise material in the exact way it was presented in the book. This was in fact how faculty measured knowledge. I remember one professor. He had his own script [summary of lectures] which we had to learn by heart. One of the chapters in this script was titled “The office of the future”. The first sentence in this chapter was: in 2000 offices will have... The irony was that I passed this exam in 2002, and he didn't accept the fact that the future as was described in the script was the past ..... Similarly, we had a little incident during the exam. After I had successfully recited the script and made one little mistake, he jumped and said: “You see you missed one part, I know the whole script by*

*heart.” ... In fact, I have given up on the Economics and studies in general because of this approach.*

(Interview with Blend, 2012)

This negative relationship with teachers, especially in higher education, may be interpreted as not only constraining learning potential but also as shaping the conceptions of teacher role models and future learning practices.

Blend’s description of his learning style as ‘inappropriate’ is constructed as a response to the assessment requirements that promoted rote learning. These requirements have forced him to recite the script, illustrating the effort that he put in trying to conform.

Constraining learning experiences are shaped by lack of resources, teacher centred pedagogies that overemphasise rote learning and limit questioning, creativity, and critical reading, reasoning and writing skills. Constraining pedagogies and authoritative relationships with teachers influences questioning abilities and may force learners to conform in order to adjust to assessment criteria. While it is recognised that social circumstances affect teachers as well as students (Slinn, 2008, Luzha, 2015), constraining learning experiences influenced the adoption of academic standards specific to the Kosovo context, which may not have activated participants full potential.

### ***Enabling Learning Experiences***

*Enabling learning experiences* are related to *engaging pedagogies* and to *nurturing student-teacher relationships*. Despite constraints with resources, participants valued education and reported enabling experiences. In particular, participants perceived primary education as more enabling than secondary and higher education. This may be explained by the longer tradition of teacher training and better relationships between students and teachers at this level (Vula et.al, 2012). Findings also suggest that some participants experience improvement in pedagogies in the post war period. In some cases, the changes are introduced in a few modules within the

programme, and in other cases, they are integrated within the programme. Enabling learning experiences, as narrated by participants, are linked with the desire to learn as well as with engaging pedagogies from early school years, and at times in their experience with study programmes supported by committed local or international teachers or by foreign investment.

Participants report differences in pedagogies depending on teachers and discipline.

*So I belonged to the generation situated between the old system and reforms in higher education. It was shocking. ..It made me feel that I am in between two worlds. In one class you went to the world where lectures and books were from the previous economic and political system, and in some classes you had modern economic thinking.*

(Interview with Ilir, 2012)

*The teacher cannot get in your mind and see how you make meaning of the piece. The teacher gives input, but you are the one who interprets music. You give life to it, and it becomes your interpretation.*

(Interview with Linda, 2012)

Ilir describes his experience of conflicting pedagogies as being situated in between two worlds. In one world, socialist economic perspectives were taught, and in the other world, modern economic concepts and thinking were introduced. Similarly, Linda illustrates differences found in regular schooling. Linda's account may be interpreted as recognising the value of arts and artistic expression in education. The teacher has limited control on the experience and the artist is also an author, as the piece takes on life through interpretation. In the arts, students can freely express their feelings and experiences of the learning material. Being

exposed to different pedagogies allows learners to compare and differentiate their influence on them as learners.

Six participants (Linda, Alisa, Doni, Yllka, Fiona and Engjell, Rron) reported engaging pedagogies. They describe enabling learning experiences with engaging pedagogies that stimulate critical thinking, writing and freedom of expression. These cases have in common practices in elementary school and in higher education programmes supported by international capacity building programmes.<sup>53</sup>

*I gained basic competence in academic writing (competence which was useful for work and in MA and now in PhD Studies) in the elementary school. I give credit to teacher B. K. who introduced a structure in writing essays containing an introduction, development and conclusion. I became a passionate reader (I am still today) because we engaged in reading and writing.*

(Interview with Rron, 2013)

*It was very challenging and it was pretty different from other departments, taking into consideration the conditions in Prishtina after the war. As a new department, the faculty [department] was supported by donors. In the first and the second year 90% were covered by one foreign professor and one local professor, it was a combination. There was a different and more innovative approach to learning and very active lectures. We had an academic writing course from the first year, which we considered as very useful. For this field of study presentation, writing and reading skills are essential. The management quality of the department experienced a regress for a period as a result of changes in the leadership of*

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<sup>53</sup> TEMPUS,

*the department<sup>54</sup>but the quality of studies remained at a very good level during the entire studies.*

(Interview with Don, 2013)

Rron's narrative reveals the importance of pedagogies that engage reading and writing in early schooling in developing a reading culture and in developing language expression. Don's narrative represents an example of the impact of implementation of engaging teaching and evaluation methods by young staff members, foreign professors, and Kosovo professors who studied and lived abroad in the development of critical thinking and writing skills. Findings suggests that the younger participants experience improved learning experiences and view themselves as participating in a changing learning environment in Kosovo.

Nurturing student and teacher relationships are reported as those that promoted teacher responses to student requests, freedom of expression and allowing questioning and discussion. For example, Alisa attended newly established programmes in the Public University that were supported by international aid, whereas, Fiona attended a private college and was taught by scholarship beneficiaries, including three participants in this study.

*We had foreign teachers and teachers who had studied abroad. In fact it was a surprise when teachers expressed their readiness to be available for us. We could see them anytime we had problems, needed advice, and wanted more information. They had a schedule when we could see them. They also could be contacted with email. It was different with local professors but not every local professor was the same. Those who studied abroad were more ready to cooperate and had a different approach.*

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<sup>54</sup> The experience of one of the international professors engaged in the department where this student has studied is presented in the Chapter 2: Kosovo Education Landscape page 53

(Interview with Alisa, 2012)

*In Kosovo I had a very good experience. We had very good study conditions. We had unlimited access to our professors and assistants.*

(Interview with Fiona, 2012)

Alisa's and Fiona's experiences demonstrate knowledge and practice transfer by staff members participating in capacity development programmes. Fiona is actually taught by three participants in this study and others similar to them who were part of scholarship schemes. Alisa and Don attended programs that received international support. Evidence from these cases suggests an integration of new teaching practices in Kosovo educational programmes and an impact on changing the education experience of learners.

*Being a learner in Kosovo* is entangled with changing learning experiences that shaped academic standards and competences within a community of practice. Participants report nurturing teacher-student relationships in elementary schools, in private schools and in university programmes supported by international aid and undergoing reform. Others reported experiencing both constraining and enabling experiences depending on the teachers' commitment and experience. In some cases, engaging pedagogies were supported by hiring local and international staff with international experience and by capacity development projects. In general, participants highlighted the importance of teacher commitment, experience, and nurturing student-teacher relationships in promoting engaging pedagogies and in developing higher academic standards.

## Learner Selfhood

*Learner Selfhood* represents the individual identification of learners in entanglement with internal and external identifications through interaction. This term draws from Jenkins' view (2004, p.49) of individual as “embodied” within time and place and as “individual’s reflexive sense of her own particular identity, constituted vis a vis others in terms of similarity and difference”. *Learner Selfhood* may include attributions and beliefs within specific settings or ‘frames’ (Jenkins, 2008.p.92) through evaluation, labelling, self and other attributions. Jenkins makes a distinction between nominal and virtual identity, where nominal identity refers to a label in which learners are identified, and virtual identity means the practical implementation of the identity over time (Jenkins, 2008.p.100). *Learner Selfhood* encapsulates both as a synthesis of learner individual identification in context and in relationship with others over time.

From participants’ narratives, two main categories emerged: 1) *Learner Identification* and 2) *Learner Epistemology* which represent learner identification based on performance criteria and other academic and non-academic attributions and learner epistemology in terms of knowledge and learning assumptions that shape *Learner Selfhood*.

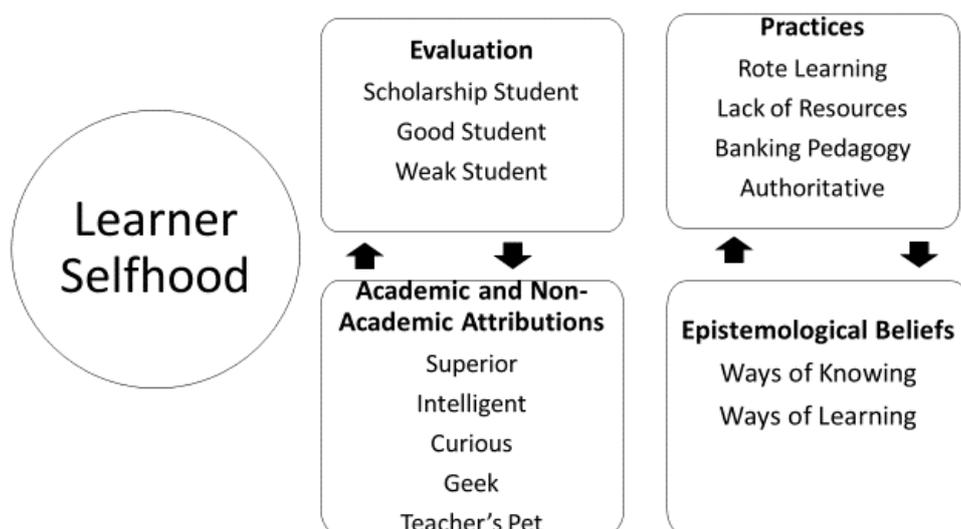


Figure 18 Learner Selfhood Dimensions as Reported by Participants

*Learner Selfhood* constructs are self-reported and are not based on ability, intelligence, personality, or epistemic beliefs testing. Concurring with Ackerman, (1997, p. 177), the reported self-identification by participants is not necessarily mapped with personality, but rather with learner perceived ability and interest. Although self-reports may be biased, Freund and Kasten(2012) argue that positive distortions generally contribute to maintaining positive self-concepts and future learner behaviour. The categories of *Learner Selfhood* presented in this section represent a general learner identification and do not include professional identity or discipline identifications such as economist, teacher or lawyer. Therefore, learners' constructs of selfhood narrated reflexively are analysed as participants' individual identification as learners.

### ***Learner Identification***

Learners are identified through academic and non-academic attributions. Evaluation is an important criterion in *Learner Identification* in formal education through grades or teacher appraisal. Performance is interpreted through comparisons among peers on specific academic skills and thus often concentrates on relevant competences in context. While academic evaluation criteria are a primary source of learner identification, other non-academic dimensions may be embedded in evaluation practices, such as neatness, obedience, physical appearance and dress (Wilken and Van Aardt,2012).

Very often self and other attributions arise from various learner interests, talents and abilities. At times, students negotiate their *Learner Selfhood* with attributes assigned based on stereotyping. Learners reinforce their learner identity in interaction with peers and significant others in social context. Therefore, identification based on dimensions of academic performance and attributions is contextual and ongoing.

Three categories of identification based on academic performance emerged from the data: 1) Scholarship Student; 2) 'Good Student' and 3) 'Weak student'. The term 'Scholarship Student' is borrowed from Lin and

Cranton(2005, p. 447), representing a student who is “almost always viewed as a good student (eager to please, motivated, high achieving, well-behaved).” All participants report in varying degree the attributes of scholarship student. Five participants, Alisa, Doni, Engjell, Jorik and Blend occasionally considered themselves average, or generally good students. Only one participant (Blend) described himself as ‘weak’. However, his self-concept as weak refers to a period of time when his academic performance was measured mainly through reading and drawing skills as well as his physical ability to do sports. Therefore, participants’ learner identification, according to the academic performance dimension, could be portrayed with the category ‘scholarship student’.

Participants’ descriptions of themselves in the narratives, placed in the category scholarship student can be captured with the words: “best student”, “active in learning”, “motivated”, “systematic learner” and “ambitious” (NVIVO Codes) or with examples of interviews with Jora and Ilir.

*I was very ambitious, extremely ambitious and I had good grades in all subjects, school suited me very well. In high school I was oriented more towards mathematics, and during the first and second year, by the end of the year, I’ve realised that I had 30 notebooks filled with math exercises, I worked in those all night long and that gave me great pleasure..... I was very active in learning; I really wanted to study...*

(Interview with Jora, 2012)

*I was one of the best students in school, based on good grades. For me to show my grade booklet with all fives was everything. So I was a distinguished student. For example, if you measure success by also being part of class structures, such as being a president of class. So I always belonged to the student bodies. I attended the gymnasium X, an elite school for that time. The*

*difference was that while in primary school there were four top students, in X school all students were top students. There too, I had all fives [A] in all subjects.*

(Interview with Ilir, 2012)

Both Ilir and Jora express motivation for learning and striving to get good grades. They identify themselves based on grades and their performance in comparison with others.

A *Good Student* in comparison to the scholarship student represents the description of performing students who do not consider themselves outstanding, although they may have excellent performance as far as test or examination results are concerned.

*... During university studies, I was an average student, who didn't only think about learning, as some students did.*

(Interview with Engjell, 2012)

*At the age of 6 -7, within those 6 first months there is a "mountain" of developments, .... For example, I was among the weakest students in Physical Education, because I couldn't be compared to the boys in my class, I couldn't run as quickly as they did, I couldn't play football as good as they did, because I was shorter than they were.*

*I managed to be distinguished as a good student only in third class because of maths. In the 3rd & 4th grade I started to catch up to other children, because until then I was evaluated by psycho-physical skills and the way I wrote and drew, not how correct but how neat and clean I was.*

*Also in high school this kind of trend continued. I was considered one of the best students, this happened probably*

*because of my math ability. Perhaps this was some kind of barometer for the good student.*

(Interview with Blend, 2012)

Self-identification as “average” as in the narratives of Engjell, is related to his interest in more than being the best student in class. Blend’s narrative reveals other criteria for being recognised as a good student, such as neatness, physical ability and appearance. Although these may be considered non-academic attributes, they may be interpreted as academic evaluations of performance, thus depicting the entanglement of different dimensions in academic practices and in shaping learner selfhood.

Participants can be described as motivated learners, eager to learn and succeed. Their *Learner Selfhood* is primarily reinforced through grades. This concurs with Reynolds (1988) that maximum grades are the primary reinforcement enhancing not only academic identification but also general identification. In their narratives, participants describe themselves from their own and others points of view, thus illustrating the dynamics of internal and external identification.

*There was not enough material or resources to satisfy our intellectual curiosity. We were interested in more but teachers either were not motivated, or did not have time and possibilities to do something more. There was a problem also with their preparation. We sometimes felt they did not know enough to satisfy this curiosity or go deeper in the subject or topic.... Within our class we were a group of 6-7 people who were interested not only in grades but also in what we were learning. So although we were young we discussed about different phenomena. I was personally attracted by social sciences. We took a movie and interpreted it in connection to what we were learning. We tried to read newspapers and magazines available in order to get a deeper understanding of issues.*

(Interview with Alisa, 2013)

*As a student, because of my family interest in education, I was very interested in school and in reading. I was considered as one of the best students in class and in the school. I was known as a person who could very easily elaborate issues. Now when I think about it, I might look at this differently [Reflecting]. I had generally good skills in expressing myself orally or in written. I was considered to have talent for narratives. I was distinguished for essays, literature reports and in a way I was identified as a person who could write well.*

(Interview with Linda, 2013)

Alisa's and Linda's narratives illustrate a range of influences such as family, peers and teachers in the construction and interpretation of Learner Selfhood. Their identification as intellectually curious and having writing talent is validated with others.

Participants reported negotiating other non-academic attributes in the context of uniformity imposition among students at school. Some of them mention being labelled as "teacher's favourite" and "geek" to represent how they were perceived by others. For example, in the narratives of Jora and Linda, it is evident they negotiate labels and stereotypes.

*I was the teachers' favourite as they fulfilled my requests. For example, if I wanted to have information or had an initiative for something, they didn't hesitate to give me information and support me. ...In high school I was oriented more towards mathematics, and during the first and second year, I realised that I had 30 notebooks filled with math exercises from the "Bogoslavov Ven books" [Mr VENE T. BOGOSLAVOV]. I solved math problems all night long with great pleasure, even before the professor taught the chapters. I was very active in learning, I really wanted to study, but on the other side, I was not among the geeks. I was also very outgoing, I wanted to go*

*out, meet my friends, deal with different activities and shows at school, I wanted to be engaged with both sides.*

(Interview with Jora, 2012)

*Well for me it was not difficult, but for the majority of students it was. It was also harsh. Make up was not allowed. We had to be very careful. We had a uniform, and we were not allowed to have a particular hairstyle or any style that gives you another identity. So anyone who pursued these had real problems. Only if they were very smart and studied hard [like her] could they get away with it. If not that influenced their evaluation.*

(Interview with Linda, 2012)

Jora tries to negotiate her conception of teachers' pet and maths geek with that of an outgoing girl. The self-concept of an outgoing girl is reinforced through engagement in school activities and going out regularly. Similarly, Linda expresses her self-identification as an outgoing girl through hairstyle, make up and dress, by resisting the dress code embedded in the school culture. In both cases, there seems to be a privileged relationship with teachers based on their performance as learners. *Learner Selfhood* is constructed in interaction, and findings reveal that teachers may use different criteria for different students. This dynamic in identification is illustrated with what Jenkins (2008, p.47) refers to as 'the internal and external dialectic' in construing and validating *Learner Selfhood* in interaction with others.

Participants can be described as motivated learners, eager to learn and succeed. Their identification as learners is primarily reinforced through grades. This concurs with Reynolds (1988) that maximum grades are the primary reinforcement enhancing not only academic identification but also general identification. Narratives also illustrate the internal external dialectic in shaping *Learner Selfhood* through performance criteria,

comparison among peers and self and others attributions. *Learner Identification* happens in communities of practice over time and shapes the process of becoming a learner.

***Developing Learner Epistemology***

*Learner Epistemology* is referred to by Schomer-Aikins (2004,p.20) as a system of epistemological beliefs about stability of knowledge, structure of knowledge, sources of knowledge, speed of learning and ability to learn, which may develop asynchronously over time. In defining *Learner Epistemology* as consisting of a set of beliefs about knowledge and learning, according to Ichikawa et al (2012), analysing knowledge poses various difficulties due to differences of approaches and conditions in the analysis of truth, justification and beliefs. In the transformative learning literature there is reference to epistemology in terms of ways of knowing (Belenkey, 2000, Kegan, 2000), ‘nature and use of knowledge’, ‘epistemic assumptions or presuppositions’, and ‘epistemic meaning perspectives’ (Mezirow, 1991, p.123). Additionally, a distinction is made on the types of knowledge such as “know that” and “know how” (Ichikawa et al, 2012) and in types of learning such as ‘reflective learning’, ‘non reflective learning’, ‘instrumental’ and ‘communicative’ learning (Mezirow, 1991, p.123). Both knowledge and learning beliefs represent a web of assumptions and meaning perspectives in which *Learner Epistemology* is developed.

The Schomer-Aikins model of the embedded system adds aspects of learning such as learning speed and ability to learn which are useful to discuss learner epistemologies in a sense that includes the influence of culture in shaping epistemology Schommer-Aikins and Easter (2008, p.922). The influence of context discussed in *Being a Learner in Kosovo* as well as internal and external influences in *Shaping Learner Selfhood* informs the discussion of personal epistemology development. It should be noted that participants’ epistemological beliefs are interpreted from their narratives on learning experiences and are not based on any measurements. The intention is to show links to how learning experience shapes epistemic assumptions as a dimension of learner selfhood.

Participants share a framework in which *Learner Epistemology* is shaped. For example, participants' narratives illustrate how learning experiences with a rote learning emphasis, lack of resources, under development of critical reasoning skills and authoritative student-teacher relationships shape knowledge and learning dimensions.

*In high school, we were used to studying one or two chapters to get a grade. At the university, this volume was significantly bigger. We had a book and from this book we had to get the grade. So it all depended on how well you memorised the book.*

(Interview with Arbnor, 2012)

*The problem was with my approach to the exam. I tried to memorise details of the book and the chapters. And as I could not make any sense of it, it was difficult for me to reproduce it exactly as it was in the book. I am saying memorising, because this is the style of learning from primary school. We were all the time in reciting mode. Even when we recited poems, we never discussed what they meant to us.*

*In Kosovo I knew what the conclusion was and everything I did was trying to match that conclusion. For example, this is white? Now let's find reasons why it is white. To adopt these reasons to that fact. No matter if it was white or not. We had to use arguments that match this conclusion.*

(Interview with Ilir, 2012)

*Sometimes I wasn't able to understand the difference between what I must necessarily learn ... I treated all the information in an equal way.*

(Interview with Donika, 2012)

These narratives in conjunction with those in the section called *Being a Learner in Kosovo*, illustrate learners' common frame, where learning practices promote knowledge as information provided by an authority or a book, and the process of knowing as a reproduction of knowledge in appropriate formats and practices. The narratives suggest that practices translate into learner beliefs, which then influence approaches to learning and learning styles. For example, Arbnor believed that a good memory was needed to succeed at school. Similarly, Ilir adopted a "reciting mode" as his learning style thus adopting a memorisation and non-questioning behaviour. In other words, learning practices influence student performance, creativity and questioning abilities. Questioning abilities are important for the development of reflective judgment which is crucial in shaping epistemic assumptions (King and Kitchener, 2010).

Epistemic assumptions are shaped gradually and with education. King and Kitchener (2010) in their longitudinal research on the development of reflective judgment, identified seven stages of reflective judgment which they grouped into three main categories. In the first category, pre-reflective judgment (stages 1-3), knowledge is certain and taken for granted from an interpretation of authority. In the second category, quasi-reflective judgment (stage 4 and 5), knowledge is uncertain and internally construed, thus prone to multiple interpretations. In the third category, reflective judgment (stage 6 and 7), knowledge is objective and open to change. Knowledge claims are understood in context and evaluated based on reason and evidence. They conclude that reflective judgment is associated with age and educational level, reporting findings that reflective judgment is present in graduate students and consistent only in doctoral students. According to King and Kitchener (2010), reflective judgment develops slowly and steadily in wave like stages within one category and radically from one category to another.

While it is recognised that reflective judgment is developed in higher levels of education, the findings reveal that a questioning of frame prior to study abroad experience is reported by only five participants (Linda, Leka, Alisa, Vlera and Blend), to varying degrees.

*Teachers came from a different and more conservative mentality. On the other hand we were more liberal and more open. Information presented to us was the only truth or how it should be. So we had to obey. If you had a different idea, you were afraid of the criticism and we could not express what we thought. You were considered revolutionary.*

(Interview with Alisa, 2012)

*I had problems getting adapted to the system. By nature, I am not a conformist who accepts rules and I try to give my personal nuance to everything that I do. If you wanted to pass the exam with a higher grade, you had to adapt to the professor's preferences and this presented a problem for me. Especially in literature where the interpretation is something very individual and there is no need to agree to someone's personal opinion about this. The characters give you the opportunity to create an image yourself and those characters make you imagine the act totally differently from someone else's imagination. I had to adapt those interpretations only because of the grades.*

(Interview with Vlera, 2012)

In the narratives above, learners questioned practices, sources of knowledge and truths, but conformed in order to be recognised as a “good student” by teachers. For example, although Alisa recognised that there were different truths, she obeyed during evaluation. Similarly, Vlera recognised the limitations of the study requirements and grading system, yet conformed in order to get good grades. This implies that *Learner Selfhood* is influenced by expectations and relationships. In this way, education practices that discourage questioning and multiple interpretations influence the development of epistemological beliefs and learner selfhood.

### **Learning and Professional Trajectories**

*Learning and Professional Trajectories* refer to the continuous development of learning identity through learning, professional roles and learner motivation for self-development. Trajectory is defined by Wenger (1998, p.154) as ‘a continuous motion-one that has momentum of its own in addition to a field of influences’. Professional role is a learner identity in practice shaped at work, higher levels of education and other formal and informal learning opportunities. In fact, according to Peterson (2013), 70% of learning and development takes place on the job, thus making the world of work an important space of learner identity shaping. Although identity and behaviour motivations are connected, according to Jenkins (2008, p.6), they are not neutral, consistent or predictable. Entanglement results from complex planning, improvisation and habit, and other influences such as emotions, interests, health and wellbeing, access to resources, knowledge and world view and the impact of others, along with other factors (Jenkins, 2008, p.9). In this way, there may be internal and external drives that influence professional development and study abroad intentions.

The majority of participants were already working in Kosovo before going to the UK. For some (Linda, Jora, Rina, Rron, Blend, Leka, Jorik) the study abroad opportunity became accessible in their early professional development and for some (Fiona, Donika, Yllka) it was a straight transition from undergraduate studies. For others (Rron, Leka, Blend, and Jora) it was a motivation to return to education. All participants are motivated for further professional development. Their motivation may be expected considering their motivation as learners. They secure jobs, change jobs, change orientation, return to education and seek study abroad opportunities in their pursuit of professional careers. Their motivation is driven by internal and external influences which are further discussed separately in two categories: 1) Professional Identity Development Drives and 2) Study Abroad Motivation.

***Professional Identity Development Drives***

*Professional Identities* are shaped through education experience, social activities and work experience. Education experience shapes *Professional Identities* through assessment that selects learners in different types of schools by judging ability and relevance for subjects and fields of study. For example, there may be different requirements to enrol in architecture, education or medicine. Similarly, occupations such as architecture, teaching or a medicine match qualifications in the respective discipline. Identities such as math lover, passionate reader or musician and many others are developed through formal and informal education. In addition, other learning and social situations, such as managing a project, a club, a charity or an event, contribute to developing skills, attitudes and values that shape identities such as environmentalist, activist or youth leader, among others. Work roles, such as that of an accountant, risk manager, treasurer, pianist, educator, IT manager, or HR specialist, further shape *Professional Identities* through work experience in the professional communities of practice. *Professional Identities* are developed in interaction with the social context and are continuously reshaped and performed as multiple identities.

As the majority of participants have secured employment early in their careers, they are in the process of developing their professional identities. Some of them have also developed adult family roles coexisting as part identities (Illeris, 2013).

*I was a student, a mother and a wife. In addition, I was already working at something completely different and not related to my education.*

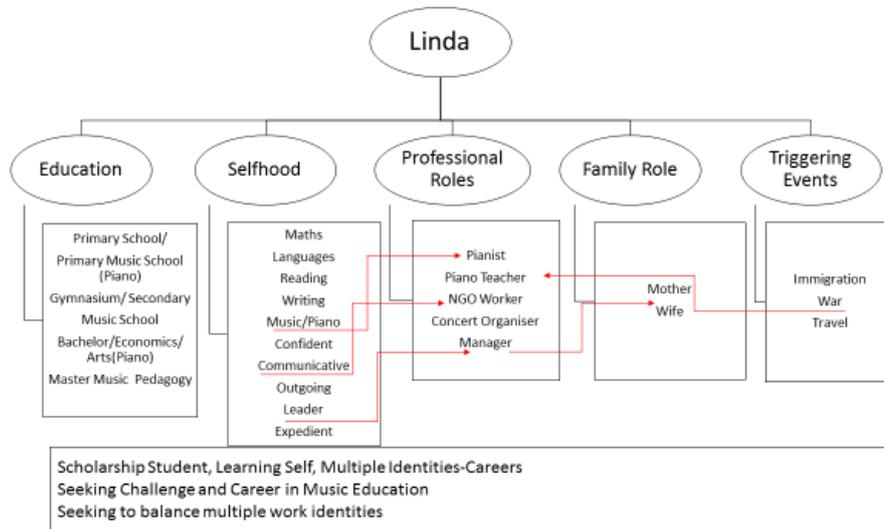
(Interview with Vlera, 2012)

For example as Linda reveals:

*I was a pianist, event organiser, an NGO worker, a teacher, a mother, identities I still hold.*

(Interview with Linda, 2012)

The influence of multiple identities on each other and the internal and external drives in developing *Professional Identities* can be illustrated by Linda's experience in Figure 18.



**Figure 19 Model of Multiple Identities and Drives: Linda**

As Linda explained, she always loved school and simultaneously attended regular school and music school and later piano studies and economics. Her identity as a pianist is shaped by her education. However, the pianist identity is reshaped into an identity as a concert organiser and a piano teacher when faced with the situation of having to drop her pianist career during the war. Her engagement in organising events made her very successful in the role of Programme Manager at an international NGO whose activities involved organising multiple events. Her communicative nature and activist work in student bodies and later at the NGO, secured her contacts and a network. However, her primary identification as pianist and musician determined her choice to pursue a music educator career. This choice was influenced by her ambition for a teaching career and her desire to maintain the other job in the NGO sector. Her “mother identity” although strong, is described as almost a management position, as it entails “not being home most of the time”, but “managing two jobs, organising events, studying and everything else”. A skill she gained through work experience, rather than through economic studies.

In many cases, participants reveal how they have expanded their learner identities through work. For example, the nature of work had a direct influence on the way they learned and on their career choices. Participants who worked for international organisations after the war, developed their English speaking and writing skills, IT skills as well as, in some cases, their analytical and problems solving skills. For example, Rina develops her legal competence and writing skills in an international organisation rather than through studies. Rron developed his data base management skills and a project manager role although he quit his studies in computer engineering. Similarly, Jora developed a career as Communication and PR Officer through her work, without any prior educational background in the field. In addition, some participants have been able to use their skills to develop their competences rather than their qualifications. Four participants (Rron, Blend, Leka and Jora) returned to education to “formalise their knowledge and experience” obtained through work, in order to ensure security for future occupational roles and to apply for scholarships. Therefore, work experience is an important drive for returning to education and for further professional development through study abroad.

Professional Identity is also influenced by triggering events that cause what Mezirow (1991) terms “disorienting dilemmas”. Alisa experienced a triggering event when she became aware of her environmental concerns and the fact that she could not practice her profession as a psychologist. She completed a bachelor in psychology but she could not work as a councillor or a therapist because the professional license was conditioned by a master’s degree qualification, which was not offered in Kosovo. Her concerns became stronger when she connected with the environmental cause and became one of the environmentalists engaged in advocating for improved environmental conditions in Kosovo.

*I had to wait for 2-3 years for license and was obliged to complete a master in psychology to practice the profession of psychologist. In the meantime, I found another job and I saw that I was not interested in practicing this profession. I was involved in projects dealing with youth. An interesting dynamic of work attracted me in this direction. But I realised that management is important in all fields and psychology helps management. I was concerned about the environment. I was bothered by how people behaved and misused resources. I saw lack of education in relation to interaction with the environment. I wanted to do something about this.*

(Interview with Alisa, 2012)

A circumstance, such as not being able to continue her master's degree in Kosovo in order to practice her profession, is disorienting for Alisa, however the disorientation triggers the re-conceptualisation of her professional identity by realising that she could use psychology in other professions. In addition, her interest in the environment also drew her towards a career that involved management and environment. In this case, the occupation role is not achieved, but her competences are transferred to different opportunities.

Evidence from participant narratives in this study suggests that *Professional Identities* are shaped at work and that the knowledge and skills gained through work had a significant impact on learner identities and further study abroad intentions. Professional Identity encompasses processes where learners are identified according to their sense of belonging, the role they play, how they view themselves in different contexts and how others view them. In addition to work experience, family roles such as that of a mother or family care giver, also have direct influence on career paths and destinations. These roles negotiate and compete with each other according to circumstances. In general, professional identity is learner identity in practice, which involves negotiation, conforming and

rejection, which shape identity and corresponding attitudes, beliefs, behaviour, motives and intentions.

***Study Abroad Motivation***

A study abroad scholarship, for participants in this study, was a golden opportunity for their further professional development. Some participants availed themselves of the opportunities through references from their work place. Five participants applied for scholarships more than once. All participants were recruited through scholarship calls followed by testing and interviews. While for most of the participants in this study, intentions to study abroad were motivated by perceived differences in the value of the degree and the opportunity for better career prospects, their reasons to study particular programmes and choosing the UK, in most of the cases, seem to be externally imposed by the scholarship opportunities. Table 5 presents participants' reasons for studying abroad.

Table 6 Participants' reasons to study abroad

Pseudonyms	Reasons for studying abroad
1 : Yllka	Learning
2 : Vlera	Career
3 : Rron	Learning Career
4 : Rina	Learning Perceiving postgraduate studies in Kosovo inappropriate and not challenging
5 : Linda	Learning Career (To get the position of faculty) Perceiving postgraduate studies in Kosovo inappropriate and not challenging
6 : Leka	Career To compensate the last time Perceiving postgraduate studies in Kosovo inappropriate and not challenging
7 : Jorik	Perceiving postgraduate studies in Kosovo inappropriate and not challenging
8 : Jora	To return to London To go out of the country
9 : Ilir	To be distinguished from average
10 : Fiona	Perceiving study abroad more valuable, Perceiving postgraduate studies in Kosovo inappropriate and not challenging
11 : Engjell	Perceiving postgraduate studies in Kosovo inappropriate and not challenging
12 : Donika	Learning
13 : Doni	To go out of the country
14 : Blendi	To go out of the country
15 : Arbnor	To go out of the country Perceiving postgraduate studies in Kosovo inappropriate and not challenging
16 : Alisa	Learning Career To go out of the country Perceiving Social Sciences Studies not advanced in Kosovo

For example, Linda and Leka reveal:

*I decided to get a PhD because I wanted a university career and it was obligatory to remain in the faculty. I considered that I would not benefit from this tradition in Kosovo.*

(Interview with Linda, 2012)

*I wanted to differentiate myself from the average person.*

(Interview with Leka, 2012)

*I was interested in getting a scholarship that would cover all my expenses there, and mainly because I think education abroad opens doors in the world for you. Although I think I had a very good basis to start with, I think for master's level and PhD it is better to study abroad. But I think there is a possibility of getting a good education here, especially at the bachelor's level. So I wanted to have a degree that is recognised everywhere in the world: A degree that is recognised by the employer. And a possibility to make a change in my life."*

(Interview with Fiona, 2012)

*It was a dream that I shared with most of the youth in Kosovo. I wanted to see the modern life, create friendships and connections. We were isolated and I wanted to study abroad even during my bachelor studies, but scholarship opportunities for bachelor studies did not exist and I had financial constraints to pay studies myself. Some of my friends, for example went to Bulgaria in Macedonia in courses delivered in English. And in this way we [me and my friends] constantly looked for study abroad possibilities. I applied in every single seminar, summer school or international scholarship.*

(Interview with Arbnor, 2013)

*I was of the opinion that I was going to repeat Bachelor studies. So when I analysed the situation I thought okay in the end I will have a diploma with only one more qualification MSc of Economics but in fact I will not be able to learn much ... I was obsessed with going to study abroad or at some time I would only study Master's degree here if I needed the diploma*

*for my job position, but I knew that I wouldn't learn anything extra... I applied and when I won the scholarship I quit my job.*

(Interview with Yllka, 2013)

As narratives reveal, participants had internal and external drives for studying abroad, mainly related to their professional career and personal development benefits they perceived to avail from study abroad and gaining a foreign degree. Six of them are driven by the desire to learn and eight of them consider postgraduate studies abroad of higher quality. For others, it is more than that: getting challenged, getting reaffirmed, and gaining independence are their reasons.

The UK destination is determined by two scholarships (Staffordshire University and OSI scholarship scheme and Chevening Scholarships. The Young Cell Scheme offered more country choices, however institution and programme choices are determined by the scholarship schemes in most cases. The scholarships targeted development priorities, such as Economics (Staffordshire University, 2013), European Studies, Economics, Statistics, Environment (Young Cell Scheme). Only Chevening Scholarships were flexible for study and institutional choice in the UK. The scholarships targeted young applicants that had positions in government or other influential institutions. The choice of destination is presented in Table 6.

**Table 7 Reasons for Destination**

<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Reasons for destination</b>
<b>1 : Yllka</b>	Destination chosen by the scholarship
<b>2 : Vlera</b>	Seeking different experience, Choosing school due to reputation, Choosing UK to have a different perspective on EU Choosing EU studies due to career prospects Avoiding places where there are relatives
<b>3 : Rron</b>	Interdisciplinary programme, Choosing school due to reputation
<b>4 : Rina</b>	Choosing school due to reputation, Choosing destination because of family obligations
<b>5 : Linda</b>	Searching for a programme that fits family and work
<b>6 : Leka</b>	Destination chosen by the scholarship
<b>7 : Jorik</b>	Destination chosen by the scholarship; Choosing destination due to its preliminary programme
<b>8 : Jora</b>	Choosing school due to reputation
<b>9 : Ilir</b>	Destination chosen by the scholarship
<b>10 : Fiona</b>	Choosing school due to reputation
<b>11 : Engjell</b>	Destination chosen by the scholarship
<b>12 : Donika</b>	Choosing economics as it was perceived good with maths ; Destination chosen by the scholarship
<b>13 : Doni</b>	Choosing EU studies due to career prospects
<b>14 : Blendi</b>	Destination chosen by the scholarship
<b>15 : Arbnor</b>	Destination chosen by the scholarship
<b>16 : Alisa</b>	Destination chosen by the scholarship Being bothered by Environment Management

In some cases, the choice of the UK and the programme was internally motivated. Six participants chose schools on their own because of the school reputation in their field of study. Two of them chose the UK due to better travel links in comparison to US opportunities they were considering and one of them chose the UK because of prior travel experience in the UK. One participant who studied European Integration chose the UK to get another ‘sceptic’ perspective from the one present in Kosovo. There were also reasons such as location of the university and university offerings.

*... I chose the university on the basis of the university offering; for example at that time there was a professor who I admired in my field of interest. So this was my stimulation- the reason why I chose X institution and the advantage of being located in London [as a metropolitan city and with good travel links] had much to offer.*

(Interview with Rina, 2013)

*I was interested to study abroad since 2004 when the second generation of Young Cell Scholarship scheme was selected...So I applied there, I was selected for the interview, in fact I was in the reserve list, afterwards in 2006 I succeeded to win the scholarship to study what I wanted, European studies. I liked European studies because there was a prospect for a career with long and difficult Kosovo integration process in EU. I had the chance to choose three universities, to apply at three universities and then together with the scholarship agency we decided where to go. In principle they didn't force us to go to any specific university, they let us make our own choices first, afterwards I decided to go to X University in London.*

(Interview with Don, 2013)

Participant motivation for study abroad is mainly driven by their professional development motivation. Their professional identity is influenced by various internal and external motivations which stage participants' study abroad intentions. Participants perceive the UK study abroad scholarships as a golden opportunity for their professional and personal development. Although destination is externally imposed by the scholarship schemes, the study abroad intention can be better described as an urge to explore and get away from the usual, or what participants experience as isolation and limitation.

### Conclusion

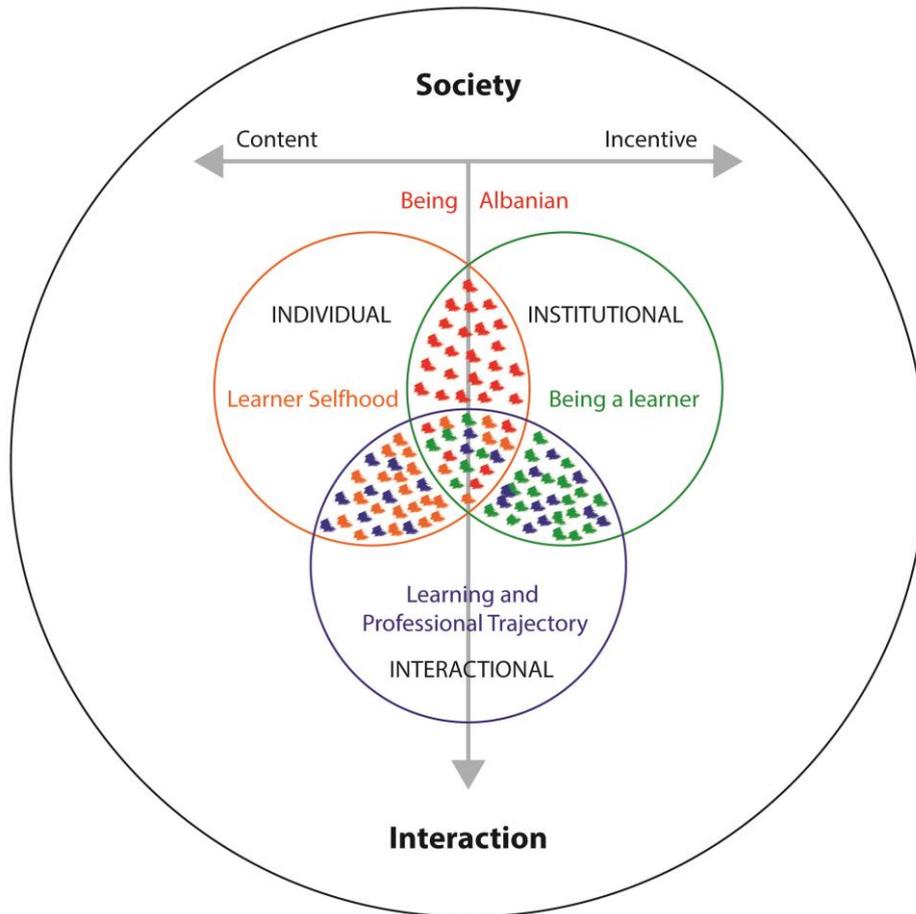
This chapter focused on the educational histories of 16 research participants from Kosovo to explore learner identity shaping through various internal and external influences in times of long-term conflict and transition in Kosovo. The shaping of Learner Identity as entanglement is presented in table 7.

**Table 8 Shaping Learner Identity in Entanglement**

<b>Shaping the Learner Identity/ Entanglement</b>	
<p><b>Collective Identity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being Albanian,</li> <li>• Being a Learner in Kosovo</li> </ul> <p><b>Learner Selfhood</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learner Identification Scholarship Student Self -Learning Student</li> <li>• Developing Learner Epistemology</li> </ul> <p><b>Learning and Professional Trajectories</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional Development Drives</li> <li>• Study Abroad Motivation</li> </ul>	<p><b>Education/Learning Processes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constraining</li> <li>• Enabling</li> </ul> <p><b>Factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal (resilience, commitment, love for learning)</li> <li>• External (access, resources, segregation, conflict, war, teaching practices, s-t relationships, support)</li> </ul> <p><b>Identity Processes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inward and Outward Attributions</li> <li>• Identity Threat</li> <li>• Identity Maintenance</li> <li>• Identity Projection</li> <li>• Identity Negotiation</li> <li>• Role Development</li> </ul>

Using Jenkins(2008) dimensions of the human world (individual order, interactional order and institutional order) and Illeris's three dimensions of learning (content, incentive and interaction) learning identity is viewed as the core dimension of identity, enabling learners to face challenges and constraints and embrace new learning opportunities in their journey of becoming a learner (Illeris, 2007; Kolb and Kolb, 2009; Jenkins,

2008). Therefore, learner identity is not purely a cognitive construct, but it is a core dimension of identity because as Kolb and Kolb (2009) argue, "people with learning identity see themselves as learners" and although this identity may be specific to certain contexts, it affects all aspects of their lives. Learning Identity as core dimension of identity is visualised in figure 19.



**Figure 20 Shaping of Learning Identity**

Notes: The figure uses Illeris' (2007, p.26) three dimensions of learning (content, incentive and interaction) and Jenkins' (2008) dimensions of the human world (individual order, interactional order and institutional order).

The category *Shaping Learner Identities* explains the entanglement and interaction of the broader societal context and communities of practice in which learning is situated with *learner selfhood* and *learning and professional trajectories*. The findings revealed insights into how the

broader context of Kosovo as a conflict and war torn society shaped participants' identities as *Being Albanians* and as *Being Learners in Kosovo*. Participants revealed how constraining factors such as artificial identity construction, ethnic segregation and overall personal and collective insecurity threatened learners' identity and limited access to resources and educational opportunities. Additionally, the underdevelopment of education and 'banking' pedagogies (Freire, 1970) shaped learning situations as narrated by participants as lacking activities involving questioning knowledge, questioning authority of sources, critical reading, thinking and writing and expressing authenticity. Participants reported engaging practices as those with supportive environments that nurtured freedom of expression and student and teacher relationships. Despite pronounced constraints, participants reported ongoing resilience expressed through individual and group agency, commitment and resistance to maintain Albanian and learner identity. The research confirms findings from the review presented in Chapter 2: Kosovo Educational Landscape that education in concert with wider societal factors has enabling and constraining impacts on shaping learning communities of practice and consequently on shaping learner identity.

Findings from this research concur with the integrative approach towards identity, which is neither totally fixed nor totally fluid, but is a process of becoming (Jenkins, 2008, Illeris, 2007, Kolb and Kolb, 2016). The shaping of learner identity is a relational identification process of situational factors and agency, where learning identity is central. It is in the communities of practice that the identification process, translated into academic and non-academic attributions through grades, appraisals, labelling and stereotyping and meanings of what a good or weak student are constructed. Through inward and outward dialectics of attribution and participation in the communities of practice, learner ways of knowing (know what and know how), ways of being, and ways of interacting (actions, communication, discourse) are shaped in context. The transitions of society and institutions are embedded and embodied in the learning experiences of their members. Institutional culture, teaching, assessment and appraisal practices shape attitudes and beliefs towards learning, skills

and competences and associated learning and professional roles. Learner identity is entangled and shaped in the trajectory from past to anticipated future as a process of becoming (Wenger, 1999).

During transition in adulthood, *Learning and Professional Trajectories* are influenced by various internal and external drives. Learning identity is entangled in a web of multiple identities shaped and reshaped in adulthood. Education in concert with professional roles, other adult roles and triggering events shapes learning and professional development trajectories, including study abroad intentions and destination. For participants in this research, study abroad was perceived as ‘golden’ and ‘dream come true’ opportunity that would enable them to transcend their limitations and isolation. However, as participants revealed, destination and choice of programmes was in most of the cases influenced by the scholarship scheme opportunities that targeted development criteria in the field of economics, EU studies, and law in combination with other internal and external drives. One of the prevailing drives, besides career opportunity through foreign credentials, was the desire to learn and to avail of quality education.

This research suggests that interaction (Illeris, 2007; Jenkins, 2008) is key to understand the internal and external dialectics in learner identity shaping, implying that societal conditions, learning situations and participants’ agency represent a field of tension with developing possibilities where neither of them is deterministic. Participants’ identification prior to their study abroad experience may be described through the term “scholarship students” (Lin and Cranton, 2005, p. 447), representing a student who is “almost always viewed as a good student (eager to please, motivated, high achieving, well-behaved). This identification represents both the constraint in the development of their learning potential through ‘banking’ pedagogies (Freire, 1970) and the resilience to learn in the constraining and changing environments in Kosovo. However, these findings should not be interpreted as stereotyping the learning culture in Kosovo or the participants. Rather, findings should serve to understand participants’ learner experiences from challenging

backgrounds in specific times of conflict and societal transitions in Kosovo and the impact on the fabric of learner identity.

## **CHAPTER 6: TRANSFORMING LEARNER IDENTITIES AT THE BOUNDARIES**

This chapter examines the participants' experiences of difference during the reciprocal interaction with home and UK environments while in the UK. When learners interact with new environments, they interpret their new experiences through lenses shaped by their previous experiences and interpretations that draw on social and cultural meanings embedded in their language, values, beliefs and practices (Mezirow, 1991). When spaces, culture, and practices do not match with participants' previous meaning making, they may face disharmony accompanied by strong feelings and reactions (Bron et al., 2011, Morrice, 2013, Jarvis, 2011, Akkerman and Bakker, 2011). Learners experience discontinuity when their meaning-making framework cannot bridge the new experience (Jarvis, 2011). Learners face boundaries when socio-cultural differences lead to "discontinuity in action or interaction" (Akkerman and Bakker, 2011, p.133). 'Boundary' is used here interchangeably with the terms 'disorientation' and 'disorienting dilemma' Mezirow (1991) to represent experiences of disharmony, disorientation and discontinuity in making meaning of their study abroad experience that lead them to resolve discrepancies between two learning contexts.

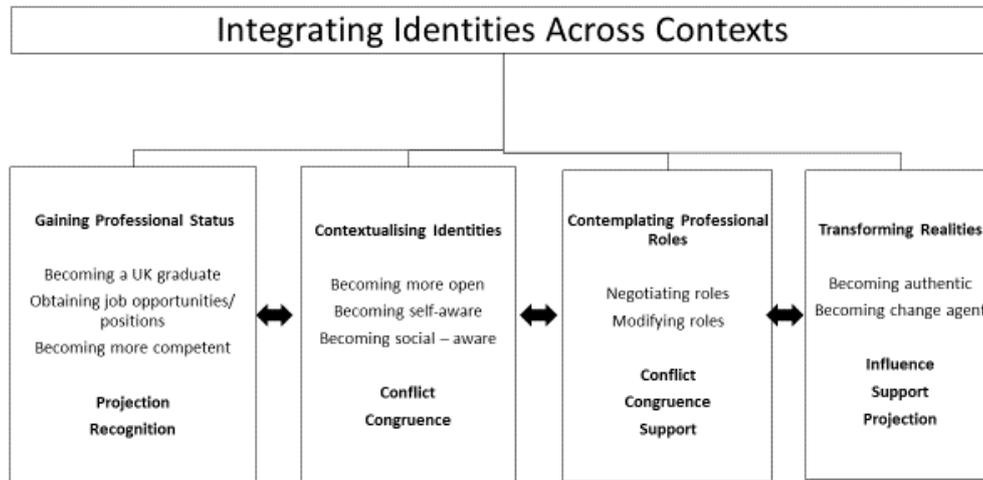
Through participation in communities of practice in the UK, participants experience boundaries positively or negatively. Mezirow (1991) argues that the disorienting dilemma is succeeded by self-examination with feelings of guilt and shame, implying that disorienting dilemmas are negative and crisis-like experiences. However, disorienting dilemmas are referred to by researchers in the transformative learning community also as positive experience, s such as 'activating events' (Cranton, 2002) or catalysts for change (Taylor, 1994). Findings in this study suggest that the disorientation is experienced differently by each participant and is related to different levels of boundaries and the feelings and actions they bring about. For example, participants report negative experiences such as feeling ashamed, inferior

and shocked and positive experiences like feeling surprised, fascinated and overwhelmed. The dimension of ambiguity of the boundary in terms of disharmony or discontinuity is related to the strength of the boundary in triggering identity exploration.

Participant data of disorientation is examined in three levels of the human world, as identified by Jenkins (2008, p. 39): 1) individual level 2) institutional level, and 3) interactional level. Disorientation at the individual level represents the students' experience related to differences in how they view themselves when interacting with places, the study discipline and learning activities. Disorientation in the institutional level is triggered by participants' encountered differences in the way things are done at the university, such as student orientation, administrative services and teaching and assessment practices. Disorientation at the interactional level is triggered by relationships with peers, significant others and teachers during the study abroad experience in university settings when students are performing their student role.

Disorientation leads to learner identity reconstruction, which involves reflection and introspection (Mezirow, 1991; Akkerman and Bakker, 2011). Mezirow (1991, p.1192) emphasises that when we interpret an experience or try to resolve a problem, we resort to reflection by comparing the current experience with prior learning. Reflection, according to him, is necessary to resolve contradictions encountered in the meaning making process in order to learn (Mezirow, 1991, p.116). Mezirow argues that in effort to interpret an experience, people reflect on content, process and premise retroactively in order to understand what, how and why they perceive, feel, think and act. In this way, they become aware of their limitations, biases and distortions which may be epistemic, sociolinguistic or psychological and may lead to changing their understandings (Mezirow, 1991). As Figure 20 shows, learners reflect on their learner identity, through questioning both contexts in trying to understand how their prior experience has influenced how they know and use knowledge (ways of knowing) and their roles as students and professionals (ways of being). Thus, through

negotiating and construing meaning in action and interaction, learners transform their learner identities.

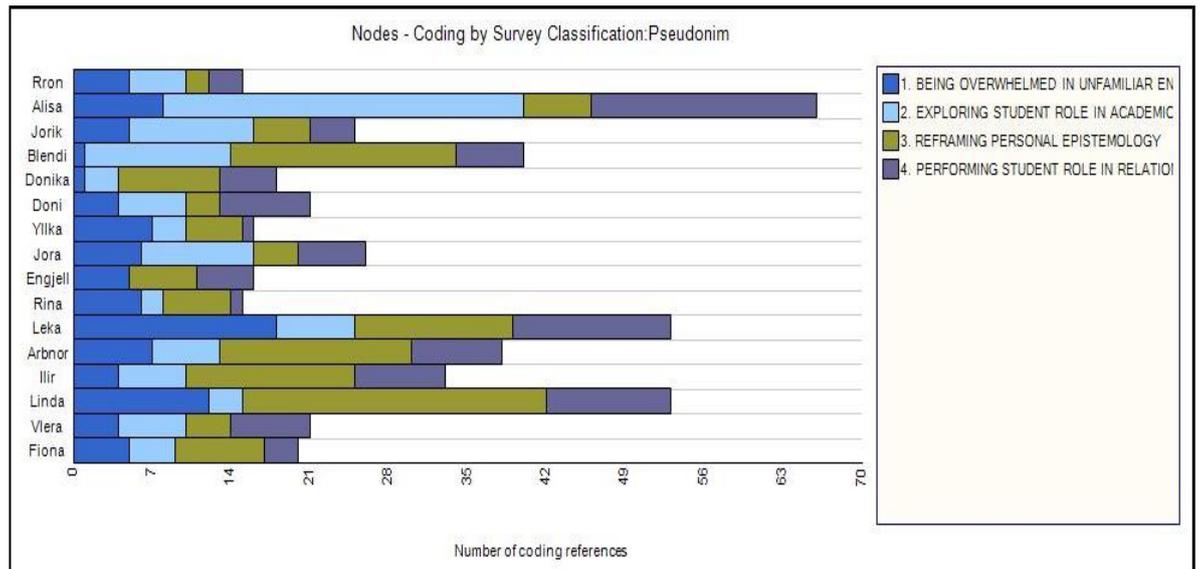


**Figure 21 Transforming Learner Identities at the Boundaries**

Dimensions of learner identity transformation may be grouped in two categories: 1) Reshaping and 2) Reframing. Reshaping refers to changes of meaning schemes or meaning perspectives in the identity of learners within the same frame of reference. That is, learners add, modify, extend and combine knowledge, skills, beliefs and expectations without changing ways of knowing and being. This implies that the boundary experience was not strong enough to change the frame in which learners operate or that they had been undergoing a transformative shift before going abroad, and were thus reinforcing such shifts with the study abroad experience.

Reframing refers to study abroad outcomes that change the understanding of what it means to be a learner, thus changing learner epistemology, roles, learning strategies and professional trajectories based on the new perspective. Reframing entails active involvement and commitment to understand the differences between cultures and how they shape participants as learners. Reframing involves an active engagement in transcending boundaries, as well as thinking, acting and performing student roles from a different perspective.

Coding references for transformative dimensions of study abroad outcomes are presented in Figure 21.



**Figure 22 Coding at dimensions of identity transformations**

Figure 21 reveals that participants experience a spectrum of identity transformation with pronounced epistemology reframing personal epistemology in five cases. Findings suggest that identity changes depend on boundary experience and the questioning and engagement process. These dimensions are examined in the analysis of Identity Transformations in four categories that represent the boundary experience and identity transformations, at the boundaries. These are:

1. Being Overwhelmed in Unfamiliar Environments
2. Exploring Student Role in Academic Community
3. Reframing Personal Epistemology
4. Performing Student Role in Relationships

### **Being Overwhelmed in Unfamiliar Environments**

Upon enrolment in the university, participants experience a major transition, which is expressed as being overwhelmed. In most of the cases, participants went abroad for the first time on their own. When moving to unfamiliar places, the meaning and the use of space becomes more unpredictable and challenging as participants try to adjust. Despite the fact that the majority of the participants described universities in the UK as “modern”, “equipped” and “resourceful” with which they were ‘fascinated’,

they also describe the experience as requiring “operating in an alert mode”, where many things that need figuring out are happening at the same time.

Being overwhelmed as reported by participants represents disharmony in two dimensions: 1) Adjustment to university settings and 2) Adjustment to university practices. Adjustment to university settings is primarily experienced positively arising from huge differences in learning settings and huge gaps in knowledge transfers. Adjustment to university practices is challenging because it affects participants’ performance and requires rethinking the role of the student. In both cases, participants compare settings and practices and their engagement with them triggers identity exploration.

#### *Adjustment to University Settings*

Participants express being overwhelmed with university settings as a feeling of being “in between” two different worlds. Encounters with different social spaces are not only perceived as physical, but are linked to their cultural meanings and uses. As Yllka explains:

*“When we first landed in London it was late at night and it was raining. The next day when I woke up, I felt like I went at the end of the world, totally forgotten and lost. ....Everything was different, starting with the campus, which was huge. It was located outside the city. It was like a state on its own in terms of the reading rooms, classrooms and books you could find in there. And then because of the department, there was the environmental centre where you could carry out research. They studied earth and plants.”*

(Interview with Yllka, 2012)

Her description of the experience as “everything was different” refers to her interaction with environments, such as the university campus. Yllka refers to

the range of resources as ‘a state on its own’ to describe her wonderment with what were unimaginable resources for Kosovo as a country and let alone for a university. The experience of lacking resources, evidenced in Chapter 5: Shaping Learner Identities interacts with the experience of accessing ‘unimaginable resources’ in the meaning making process. Moreover, Yllka’s fascination is grounded in the fact that her development as a new environment professional supported by a scholarship is situated in two completely different contexts. While in Kosovo there are no environment studies programmes, in the UK she studies in a department with an environment research centre.

Identity exploration triggered by the huge gap in between two worlds can be further illustrated with Alisa’s experience attending the same programme as Yllka:

*“One problem I had there was that I was drawing parallel comparisons between the situation there [UK] and here [Kosovo]. So I realised that these are two different worlds. So on one hand, I could see one certain practice implemented but then they had the whole apparatus behind it very well established and functioning. [...] When I thought of those issues in Kosovo, they seemed distant, and I knew that I would return to a country where there were many problems, starting from the very environment.*

(Interview with Alisa, 2012)

For Alisa, although she was learning new things, the context in which this learning was implemented was entirely different. Alisa’s disorientation is grounded in her realisation that Kosovo was so far behind regarding environmental issues, leading her to question the ability to transfer the gained experience on her return back to Kosovo. Identity exploration is accompanied by ongoing comparisons between contexts and disharmony with projecting her future professional role in Kosovo.

## Chapter 6: Transforming Learner Identities at the Boundaries

Besides being fascinated with spaces and resources, participants' belonging to the university community depended on adjustment to university settings. When participants interacted with unfamiliar environments, they often faced problems in understanding and using these spaces. Struggles were often taken for granted by universities, which expected students to learn everything by attending orientation, reading brochures and following signs. Therefore, familiarisation with the university spaces and services was very important to overcome feelings of being overwhelmed.

*"I was fascinated when I saw the library. The resources it possessed. The e-library, resources, e-journals etc. I needed 2-3 weeks just to find my way."*

(Interview with Rina, 2012)

*I was faced with a large number of resources. For me, it was the first time I used the library and journals. The library and resources changed completely the way I studied. For me, it was extra difficult because I also changed my field of study.*

(Interview with Alisa, 2012)

*"I experienced a sort of cultural shock with regard to how things functioned, such as the library and databases. I was stuck there for some time."*

(Interview with Yllka, 2012)

For students from Kosovo with a background of limited access to the use of resources, familiarisation with the library is narrated as a significant milestone in their adjustment. In terms of exploring their learner identity, the wide range of resources opened up a completely new world accompanied by anxiety about learning how to use the resources. It represented exposure to different authors and perspectives, and exposure to unfamiliar and challenging academic and professional literature and discourses. Moreover,

access to the library changed learners' relationships with learning because of access to different services.

Data suggest that the extent of shock varied depending on the participants' prior travel experience. Participants with travel experience have more realistic expectations and therefore experience less disorientation and handle challenges differently.

*“Among the group there were students that had illusions about the UK, like a fancy place and had not imagined the UK as a place to study. I knew that the place we were going was a student village, not very attractive. I always lived with my family. It was the first time I lived alone. So I had to take care of myself, and it wasn't that problematic. I could do it. The dormitories were average and nothing bothered me. I knew that I went there to study. I liked the surrounding environment, parks, green spaces and sports facilities. The university building did not impress me. Food was different and a challenge too. Prices were first perceived to be very high. I could handle that. I was mostly wondering if I would fit in with people.”*

(Interview with Leka, 2012)

*“It wasn't a problem for me. To go back to London, it was like going home.”*

(Interview with Jora, 2012)

Leka's and Jora's encounter is related to their prior experience. Leka, who was older, had caregiver responsibilities, had previous travel experience and was not 'fascinated with little things'. He could manage living alone, budget constraints and other challenges, such as food, because he had a

strong commitment to his studies. Similarly, Jora was returning “home” as she used to live in London. Because of their previous travel experience, living in the UK was looked at from different angles and was not overwhelming.

Depending on circumstances and support during adjustment, interacting with unfamiliar environments is reported as being overwhelming when dealing with new contexts, accompanied by stress, anxiety, fascination and powerful emotions. Most of the participants’ interactions with unfamiliar environments are described as being overwhelmed and being fascinated when situated in modern and well-resourced environments. In the majority of cases, being overwhelmed explains the positive experiences of disharmony, which challenge meanings and uses of space and the negative experiences of disharmony, which challenge the way participants operate in new contexts.

#### *Adjustment to University Practices*

Universities in the UK have a longer tradition than those in Kosovo<sup>55</sup>. They are described by participants as having a culture of communicating institutional practices in terms of rules, requirements, incentives and punishments mainly through writing. The separate elements are communicated orally and practically. However, the manner in which rules are communicated is different from practices in Kosovo, where there was the “habit of asking orally about the information and rules”, as well as a lack of student handbooks, module syllabi and long-term planning. Participants experienced disorientation especially when engaging with student centred services and practices of long-term planning and scheduling.

Participants are surprised and ‘fascinated’ by the unimaginable welcome and care they receive. In fifteen cases, international offices and tutors supported the initial adjustment. This support helped students concentrate on what was important during the induction period. More than merely support, the services they received stimulate the rethinking of their

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<sup>55</sup> The first university in Kosovo was established in 1969

conceptions of the role of students at the University. For example, Arbnor's experience displays a high level of fascination involving not only descriptive but also emotional tone:

*“We started preparatory courses immediately and I found the university very welcoming. They offered everything we lacked such as sheets and blankets. It felt like home. We had freedom to request anything. We had the liberty to contact the professor, write him/her. The administration gave you a pleasant feeling; you could talk about your concerns. They treated you well. They would spend time with you. I felt well.”*

(Interview with Arbnor, 2012)

In his narrative, Arbnor referral to “freedom to request”, “liberty to contact”, “pleasant feeling,” “spend time with you” clearly show questioning his ways of being in a university setting. His experience of surprise is related to how he interacted with student administration in the past. This disharmony may be interpreted as activating positive feelings and triggering a re-conceptualisation of the student role.

However, one participant recounted a negative experience, where registration problems and lack of administrative support caused disharmony with negative tension.

*“The first problem I encountered was registration. I could not register because they did not have Kosovo in their database as a state. During the first two weeks of induction, when I should have completed my registration process I was facing identification problems such as: Oh we don't know about the state, about the scholarship ...these kinds of things. I could not get my ID. I could not open a bank account without an ID, and without a bank account, I could not rent a room.*

(Interview with Fiona, 2012)

For Fiona, study abroad was the only thing she did alone, independently from her family. Fiona's registration process increased her anxiety, which caused enormous stress and frustration that affected her initial adjustment. An administrative problem, such as the inability to register due to system options for the country, was interpreted by Fiona as a problem of identification but also as a problem of bureaucracy. Her identity as Kosovan in relationship to the University registration system prevented her from properly taking part in the induction programme at the same time as other international and local students. However, Fiona's case deviates from how other students felt upon arrival in the UK. In contrast to other participants, Fiona, who attended a private high school and a private college in post-war Kosovo, expected to be treated in a timely and reasonable manner.

Adjustment to institutional rules is facilitated by student handbooks and module syllabi. When students receive all the information about their studies in written form, it is considered beneficial since universities' intention is to make the unpredictable predictable. However, the way students experience these practices is often underestimated by universities. For example, participants were not familiar with a module syllabus or study handbook as this was not common practice in Kosovo.

*“The first three months, I had to adapt to the strict organisation that they have as a society. [Laughing]. I knew what I would do in one year's time on a particular date. I had to discipline myself and organise my work. I also had difficulties in getting help. I tried to resolve my problems alone until I realised that for everything there is support. In our country, you had to deal with everything individually. There everything was formal.”*

(Interview with Alisa, 2012)

Alisa narrates that it took her three months to adapt to university rules involving discipline and organisation. The student handbooks and module

syllabus may be interpreted as ‘boundary objects’ referring to “artefacts, documents, terms, concepts, and other forms of reification around which communities of practice can organise their interconnections” (Wenger, 1998, p.105). Disorientation is experienced in the way she handled her questions and requirements and asked for help, thus emphasising how practices become part of student behaviour over time and are not automatically acquired through learning them as rules. Although information was formal and in writing, Alisa’s method to resolve her problems alone did not work as there were consequences if she was late or if she did not carefully read assignment requirements. Disorientation with organisational practices results in exploring these practices and finding ways to get support.

In contrast to the majority of participants, Vlera, who had a previous education experience in X Country, was not shocked by university practices. She explains:

*I liked the system very much. I dealt with the same system in X Country. The assessment methodology stated clearly what was expected from you; the groups were divided by the topics of the presentations and research; your deadlines were set and ...you had to attend the lectures, you had the consultations hours with the professors.*

(Interview with Vlera, 2012)

In the case of Vlera, the system does not present disorientation. On the contrary, it matches with her prior experience in X Country. This also explains her intolerance of the practices in Kosovo during her bachelor studies and her enjoyment of the familiar in the UK.

The study finds that disharmony is stimulated by and depends on the difference with institutional practices. Students who experienced more difference had more challenges to adapt in such a short time. Students, who experienced less difference, are nonetheless activated, as the enjoyment and sense of belonging engages them in further self - exploration. In general, the

new practices are imposed by school regulations and academic culture, and so they are accepted with a high degree of tolerance. This implies that students were open to change and that the new practices stimulated their actions to adjust due to the necessity of operating in the new academic environment.

### **Exploring the Student Role in the Academic Community**

Participants interact with institutional and academic practices as learners. Academic practices include learning activities and teaching and evaluation practices. Data reveal that experiences were reported as positive when they engaged student participation, offered a welcoming and interactive environment and included varying learning activities. Participants reported experience as negative when they involved different and problematic dynamics and expectations. Data suggest that exploring the student role involves engagement with academic practices and questioning ways of learning.

#### ***Engaging with Academic Practices***

For the majority of participants, exposure to new practices caused disorientation, which challenged their beliefs, opinions and expectations. These experiences are challenging and activating at the same time and engaged learners to participate. According to Wenger (1998), the experience of new practices involves mutual engagement and when learners encounter boundaries they negotiate meaning. In exploring what activities influenced change in student beliefs, opinions and expectations, the data from the LAS conducted in 2010 were analysed. The data explained what kind of activities were part of the study abroad experience, and then which activities influenced change in their beliefs, opinions and expectations.

The experience of most of the participants, was characterised by learning in small classes, working in groups, attending tutorials, writing assignments and engaging in deep extensive reading in the library. Figure 22 presents reported learning activities experienced by participants and activities that influenced change in their beliefs, opinions and expectations.



**Figure 23 Learning Experiences Reported by Students**

Source: Learning Activity Survey conducted by the researcher in 2010

Papers, assigned readings, non-traditional course structures and projects, and challenge and support from teachers or advisers were activities that were mostly reported to have influenced change. The non-traditional qualification in participant responses refers to what they considered traditional when comparing Kosovo and the UK. Working in groups on assignments and in other learning activities presented a significant experience in which students differentiated their role as students and learned new things about themselves.

It is suggested that in interaction with new academic practices, participants explored their learner identity from a different perspective. According to participants, in the UK academic practices require students to be active and cooperative. The disorientation related to academic practice centres around the role of the students and interaction in the learning process.

*“What I’ve found very interesting was the interaction in learning. Professors brought different videos and different cases that were realities then, and then we analysed an issue. For example, the anthrax poisoning was typical for that time and we had to do a quantitative research on how anthrax poisoning was reported: how long are the articles, is the article on the front-page and other elements. These were very attractive methods of learning. You learn in groups participate in the analysis, and the project becomes more interesting...*

(Interview with Jora, 2012)

*“Students were divided into groups, a topic was set and one group was for that topic the other group was against. Probably you also learned how to defend a position that you didn’t even believe in; because you had to create arguments, to defend yourself and win the debate. I liked this a lot because the whole time you were challenged by the other group, somebody was challenging your approach, asking you which theory you were basing your opinion on, there was a lot of interaction, but I liked the fact that the professor was most of the times the leader of the group and he didn’t interrupt us by saying we’re doing good or bad. When the professor thought that you were wrong he didn’t tell you that literally but he asked you: “Don’t you think that it would be better if...” He gave you another proposal so you could provide a different discourse in a different direction of the debate.*

(Interview with Vlera, 2012)

These narratives reveal that participants reinterpret their role after they realise that learning is not only individual, but also interactive and constructive. In the first case, working in groups made the project more interesting and also involved students to participate in joint inquiry. In the second case, working out pro and con arguments contributed to developing

debating skills and to engaging students in discourse. Both narratives also illustrate how interactive classes activate the participation of learners in the analysis of problems, in finding solutions or making points. All these activities engage higher-level outcomes, such as analysis, evaluation and creation, rather than remembering and understanding. In other words, the experiences activate students thinking and participation in perspective taking and making and thus contribute to re-interpreting their student role from receivers of knowledge to construers of knowledge.

When adjusting to academic practices, students also appropriate the meanings of the rules and standards. Reading information about modules and rules involves not only translation but also adjusting the cultural meanings attached to words, such as attendance, plagiarism, re-sit, and assignment. Engaging with boundaries requires engagement in practice, as a form of participation in the community (Wenger, 1998).

*We were not used to writing assignments. To deliver them on time. To write an assignment of 5000 words. We were not used to referencing. This was the reality. During three years of bachelor studies, I don't remember that I have written an essay where I referenced someone. So it was the first time in master studies that I learned that I should reference. It was difficult because we had dilemmas like whether we should reference 50 sources or 2 sources within one page. It was completely new and we were learning this only in master studies... They were very strict with assignments; there was no possibility for non-submission. In some subjects we had formative assignments and in some subjects assignments were weighted 20 % or more. So in formative evaluation we were getting an idea of what was required in an exam. So you rehearsed the way you are going to respond in exams. For every subject you had a clear idea what the exam is going to look like and how you are evaluated. So you had continuous preparation. And topics and questions would not be repeated again. So if you don't do the*

*assignment weighted at 20% you are not going to be evaluated for that any more. In the final exam you will get only what you get from 80%.*

(Interview with Leka, 2012)

In Leka's description, new meanings are attached to the terms assignments, referencing and submission. The term deadline becomes real and non-submission has direct consequences. In addition to this, assessment varies, so students are required to carefully read assessment criteria in order to succeed. In other words, students overcome differences through learning to respond to higher-level academic standards. This type of adjustment is often difficult for students transitioning from undergraduate to postgraduate studies and especially for participants that face so many differences between the two learning contexts. The tension is accelerated because of the short time needed to adjust to university standards.

The boundaries participants face in interacting with academic practices are mostly reported in terms of learning to operate in the system and learning to adhere to academic standards. The boundaries related to academic practices trigger positive responses and actions when learners feel they need to grow, and negative experiences when the requirements affect their performance. Overcoming differences with academic practices is facilitated by the participants' obligation to adhere to practices despite having a short time to adjust. When interacting with new academic practices, participants transform their learner identity through acquisition of higher-level skills and engaging with higher academic standards.

### ***Questioning Ways of Learning***

Central to participating in the new academic community are learning strategies participants use when trying to understand concepts, read specialised literature and write assignments. Blend demonstrates the struggle as being stuck and lacking reading skills to engage with the literature:

*“My first systemic confrontation was when I had to prepare for tutorials after the lectures. Usually they gave us a big bunch of papers, and after about 10-15 years of serious education, I mean serious education, and while I was reading I tried to learn by heart, the way that we were used to learning. That cost me a lot of time and then I couldn’t manage to read all of the material. In English there is a saying “you miss the forest for the trees” meaning that you can’t see the big picture only the details. The whole meaning of the paper was lost because I was stuck in one detail I couldn’t understand, and I couldn’t understand what the actual message was or the core of the paper.*

(Interview with Blend, 2012)

Blend’s practice of rote learning was insufficient to cope with assignments that had to be based on a number of journal articles. Rote learning is characterised by memorisation of material; it takes time and does not result in understanding concepts. In Blend’s case, memorising is not compatible with the learning requirements. The new practices question his ways of learning accompanied by stress because in order for Blend to reach a balance, he needed to change his learning style, which was not easy.

For students who were considered the best students in Kosovo, their learning selfhood is put into question: “It is different to be a student in the UK”. For example, Linda, who never failed an exam and was considered a model writer, faced what she called “a fiasco” with her first assignment. Her disappointment was initially experienced as a mismatch of her expectations with the university requirements on writing. She reveals:

*Despite all that background and confidence I had in writing in Albanian and English, in my style, I was faced with basically a fiasco, because the school had high standards. These were not only of a critical discourse nature but also of a technical*

*nature. So they evaluated not only how analytical and critical you were, but also what format, font, line spacing you used. So the first assignment was problematic and when I submitted it I failed because of these technical standards. I did not format it well or reference it properly so the evaluators said it was not acceptable. I was disappointed; this was a very negative experience and a failure. I even cried to have failed an exam for the first time. I thought I was not up to the level of my colleagues but then I decided to look into these requirements and I addressed them. When I sent the second version I was told that I have made considerable improvements, that I had specifically corrected the technical part, but that the way I wrote was not critical enough. I knew that the third time, the final chance, had to be different.”*

(Interview with Linda, 2012)

The way we construe an experience is influenced by meaning perspectives which act as “perceptual filters” in the way we define, understand and act upon an experience (Mezirow, 1991, p.45). In the above example, Linda’s self-exploration is triggered by the boundaries in transferring her previous ways of writing in the new context. She engages in content reflection (What is required here, Why did I fail?), process reflection (How do practices differ? How critical should it be? ) and premise reflection (Why is it important?). Participants perceive disorientation as more than just a technical or linguistic boundary, but representing a lack of knowhow on how to respond to the system. Blendi and Jorik explain:

*“I know that the time of the first exams in January, was the “peak” of the stress for all of us. I personally couldn’t sleep more than 1-2 hours per day because of the stress and when all the exams were finished I slept 18 hours without waking up at all- a thing which did not happen in the second exam term. And this was a phenomenon for all students coming from this*

*region. It probably has to do with the fact that we were facing challenges from the system.....and despite all the advice and the moral support given by professors you just didn't have that experience."*

(Interview with Blend, 2012)

*"It was difficult to grasp the dynamics of the requirements. They were more demanding and the requirements were overwhelming. In the first semester I had some delays in submitting my assignments. I thought that the Kosovo education system was to blame probably because the requirements there were not as demanding."*

(Interview with Jorik, 2012)

Identification has consequences (Jenkins, 2008) and when faced with the initial lectures and assignments, the majority of participants reported strong feelings of stress and insecurity resulting from their preparedness and their initial performance. They describe it as "not having the right experience", "not being prepared", "weak", and "not knowing enough". According to Tmmermans(2011) changes in the context, participants' openness to engage with differences and epistemic doubting are not enough to cause people to change. For participants to change, according to Tmmermans(2011), the disharmony and cognitive dissonance must be powerful enough to move participants to an active search for balance. The findings suggest that the experience of questioning is triggered not only by requirements for adjustment to the university community and disciplinary content, but also by the necessity to accept practices encountered in the new academic community.

### **Reframing Personal Epistemology**

Belonging to an academic community entails more than adjusting to using spaces and resources and adjusting to student rituals and activities. When students encounter boundaries with their 'ways of knowing' referred

to as *Learner Epistemology* (Kegan, 200), they engage in self-exploration, which involves reflecting on differences in the study discipline as learners and as professionals. Participants reported reframing personal epistemology in terms of questioning ways of knowing and engaging in discourse. Reframing *Learner Epistemology* involves interaction between two different frames of reference and negotiation of learner identity from a new perspective in the academic community in the UK.

### ***Questioning Ways of Knowing***

Questioning ways of knowing involves questioning the content, sources of knowledge and the process of how we make meaning (ways of knowing). Questioning ways of knowing involves a deconstruction of shaping ways of knowing through reflection, thus questioning internalised beliefs about learning, knowledge and what it means to be a learner. The majority of students embarked into a UK university with a positive learner identity and with high self-confidence.

For many participants, the new experience in the UK presented a big difference and challenge at the academic level and caused them to question their previous beliefs about learning and knowledge. This is illustrated by Ilir's experience with his first classes.

*“Going to the UK was completely new. I remember very well my first day in class. Whatever was discussed there from the point of view of quality was a new experience. Although I heard about the concepts before, to tell you the truth, I even felt inferior in relation to students from the region, not to mention EU students. I felt inferior because what was basics for them, for me was the peak of knowledge.”*

(Interview with Ilir, 2012)

The new experience clearly disturbed Ilir's previous identification as 'the best student' as reported in Chapter 5: Shaping Learning Identities. The disorientation evident in his narrative arises from his feelings of inferiority and his perceived limitation of conceptual knowledge. He questions his

conceptual knowledge through comparison of himself with students from Kosovo, non-EU students and EU students. This questioning triggers questioning his belief about being a learner. Similarly, other participants' questioning of their ways of knowing is expressed as feeling "inferior", "ashamed" and "shocked" and with a recognition that their knowledge was problematic for the new context. They share intense emotional experiences.

*I meant weakness in the theoretical aspect. Direct lack of knowledge of concepts typical for undergraduate studies. We heard the concepts, they were not new, but there were holes in what we knew. Our knowledge of concepts was not grounded. I think we learned these concepts superficially and with no depth. Maybe lecturing and evaluation was not adequate. So we had superficial knowledge and we did not understand very well the concepts. This was the first shock; we felt that we didn't know enough. We were faced with a different reality. The approach of professors was different, and they constantly posed questions on topics we were supposed to know. As we were ambitious, and known as the best students, I felt inferior and ashamed. How could this happen? What did I do during all this time? I realised that there was a problem, which could not be ignored.*

(Interview with Arbnor, 2012)

Arbnor's recognition of the shallowness of his knowledge leads him to question his previous educational experience (Content and Process Reflection). However, "understanding" or "conceptualising the theories" is experienced as a problem, because new content did not fit with resident knowledge. For example, Linda further illustrates this point:

*"The first thing that struck me was in the first lectures, where professors were mentioning authors I had never heard of..... I felt underprepared and behind the rest. .... Because I was communicative by nature, I did not hesitate to share my*

*experience, starting from the fact that I was sincere in admitting that I was hearing things for the first time and that I had problems conceptualising these theories.”*

(Interview with Linda, 2012)

The problems with understanding concepts or the feelings of shallowness may be interpreted as problems with understanding ‘threshold concepts’ (Meyer and Land, 2003). Myer and Land (2003, p.1) characterise threshold concept as “portal” like concepts that represent a transformed way of understanding, or interpreting, or viewing something without which the learner cannot progress”. According to them, threshold concepts exist in different disciplines and they are transformative, irreversible and integrative in the sense that they can transform student meaning perspectives and resulting behaviour. In the narratives above, self-exploration is triggered because new content could not be easily grasped without reading theories on which the content was based. Therefore, questioning the conceptual knowledge involved participants in active learning efforts, in order to progress as learners.

Participants question their ways of knowing when experiencing disorientation with transitioning from simple and certain knowledge to complex and uncertain knowledge. It is suggested that epistemological beliefs are influenced by instructional and assessment practices and consequently influence student performance (Hofer, 2004). Blendi illustrates this challenge not only in terms of assessment strategies through writing papers, but also in terms of answering exam questions. He reveals:

*I concluded that the education in Kosovo teaches you to remember, while the education in the UK teaches you to think and I needed a lot of time to understand this. After a long period of being trained to behave in a certain way you can't just automatically say ok I know this stuff let me apply it, because we were used to receiving questions for which an exact definition existed in the book. The brain was*

*programmed that way, you simply searched for the answer, however, in the UK, the methodology with which the questions are formed consisted of conceptual questions and they didn't have only one exact answer, unlike here[in Kosovo] where the question had only one exact answer.*

(Interview with Blend, 2012)

Here Blend questions his beliefs about structure and sources of knowledge, which he suggests are promoted by education practices. He also explains that changing epistemology is not easy since the frame in which he operates is different. Therefore, during the questioning process, he realises that he needs some sort of re-programming. Using the technical terms analogy, re-programming involves a series of changes in the programme. Re-programming entails changing the content, procedures and methods, in terms of the way that information is understood, interpreted and communicated. Re-programming personal epistemology requires more than replacing content or methods; it requires changes in the frame in which learners operate. Thus reframing involves changing relationship with learning, involving changes in the learner's ways of knowing.

In questioning her personal epistemology, Linda's efforts to change the way she writes involved questioning her writing style in the cultural context both in Kosovo and in the UK. She explains:

*I realised that for example in Kosovo if we had to write for this glass that I am holding [glass of water half-filled] we had to describe first the stairs of the house, the entrance, the building, the table, then the glass and why we are using it or what is in it. There they wanted me to write about the glass, and explain the context, but the main point was the glass and its function, use, content. Or is it half-full or half empty? You must be focused. I remember when I was doing my master's, it was in the fourth chapter that I explained what I wanted to do, all*

*chapters before that were introduction [from the UK perspective]. In the UK, they wanted me to name the problem and the context [Linda failed the assignment the first time, and for the second time she was told she was not critical enough].... In other assignments, I tried to engage in this dialogue with the literature, theories and I had input from teachers, lectures and lots of reading and I improved constantly. ....It involved thinking. Thinking until your brain hurts.*

(Interview with Linda, 2012)

Linda makes a connection between the nature of written tasks she experienced in Kosovo and the UK. According to her, teacher expectations about the task shaped her writing style. Similarly, teacher expectations in the UK rely on standards that require a self-authoring approach that is based on critical thinking. The example illustrates how culture and academic practices influence how she approached a problem. As this was not accepted in the UK, she was committed to change so she could overcome the problem, in order to continue. Linda describes the change as moving away from a descriptive style and engaging in a dialogue. She describes it as both an emotional and a cognitive process of a reframing nature, where the need to change and improve involves changing how she uses her narrative talent, without discarding it, but using it in a different frame.

*So I have experienced improvement in the process. For example, my mentor liked my narrative style, and she said that I have the ability to attract the attention of the reader and I can tell a story. On the other hand, she pushed me to think about other alternatives, even the opposite of my argument, just for the sake of argumentation. So I think that the whole thesis process brings you to the point that you don't take a problem for granted. You question it and then find your way how to address it. You take a position based on information.*

*This position might be the same, contrary or neutral but it is grounded.*

(Interview with Linda, 2012)

Linda recognises the uncertainty of knowledge and justifies knowledge that is based on information from different angles and that is grounded in research. This may be described as an epistemological shift and a movement towards more reflective thinking (King and Kitchener, 2010). While it is recognised that reflective judgment is dependent on age and education levels (King and Kitchener, 2010), the findings suggest that there are significant differences that Kosovo students perceive in comparison to their UK or European counterparts enrolled in these programmes. For this reason, their transition is so emotional and challenging. Reboyl(2002, p.538) argues that any context is social and cultural and that culture drives thinking and behaviour and mediates personal epistemology, which includes both ways of knowing and ways of being.

The transformative learning community also acknowledges the influence of culture on personal epistemology. Merriam (2004) argues that in addition to a high cognitive level, experience and skills which are acquired with maturity and education are required for the learner to be able to critically reflect on assumptions, especially to critically self-reflect. Findings from this study clearly indicate cultural differences between Kosovo and the UK academic contexts. In addition, it also finds that Kosovo students are particularly challenged by epistemological doubt stemming from these differences in practices, scarce access to resources in Kosovo compared to the UK, and the dominant authority culture in Kosovo. In the case of participants in this study, it is suggested that epistemological transitions are triggered by problems in meaning making (Timmermans, 2011, p.XV) mainly due to larger gaps between the Kosovo and UK instructional, assessment, and disciplinary practices that influence their personal epistemology in the in-between space where they are situated.

*Engaging in Discourse*

For participants in this study, differences in practices include not only the discipline's academic content and learning methods, but also the way they engage in discourse through a foreign language. The meanings communicated through language are interpreted through prior disciplinary knowledge and practices in the context of Kosovo. Differences in practice may create boundaries when concepts from one language do not translate in the other language or when learners try to implement their writing and discourse styles.

Mezirow argues that through language we construct things and events (Mezirow, 1991, p.58) governed by rules and cultural codes embedded in language. The meanings communicated through language are contextualised in dialogue and within the disciplinary context. For example, Ilir explains:

*“So we were reading the most recent literature. And this information alone was very new and different. The level of papers was also different. They required a certain level of knowledge. We [Kosovan students] discussed new words found in the literature, which had no connection to what we knew until then. We could not relate it to an Albanian concept or meaning.”*

(Interview with Ilir, 2012)

Ilir's narrative concurs with Meyer and Land's(2005) suggestion that when dealing with troublesome knowledge and threshold concepts, learners not only extend the use of language by learning new concepts, refining or extending meaning, they also reposition themselves by reflecting and comparing contexts in which they have built their disciplinary knowledge. This process represents a fertile ground for transformative learning, because learners not only learn new meaning schemes, but also transform these meaning schemes.

However, initial adjustment to communication and expressing opinions clearly in a foreign language is not only linked to student language abilities, but also to cultural discourses and academic literacies (Connor, 1996; Hellstén and Prescott, 2004; Lea and Street, 2006). Although students especially faced language problems in academic writing, they also found it difficult to express themselves clearly and engage in scholarly debates. Writing and speaking in a different language require not only practice, but also the ability to think in that language. According to Lea and Street (2006,p.228) academic literacy involves not only language skills and socialisation to writing practices, including forms, specific disciplinary discourses, and academic standards, but also aspects of “meaning making, identity, power and authority and foregrounds the institutional nature of what “counts” as knowledge in any particular academic context”. Writing, for participants in this study, involves thinking in a different language and requires immersion in the culture and in the discipline in order to understand cultural and disciplinary meanings that are embedded in the language (Meyer and Land, 2003). Being engaged in a new context is stepping into new practices that are embedded in the academic institutional culture.

Findings reveal that engaging in discourse is difficult even for participants who had better preparation in English and academic writing. For example, Rina, who worked for an international organisation and for an NGO in Kosovo, felt comfortable with the requirements, yet still struggled initially to engage in debate because of her previous experience with the debating culture in Kosovo.

*“If I compare the experience, we are talking about a whole different level from a professional and theoretical point of view. Although at work I have been practicing critical thinking through writing reports and analysis, which proved to be very valuable for me, ...at the beginning, in the very first lectures I kind of hesitated. I had the theoretical skills and the practical experience but I didn’t have the typical debate skills by which*

*they develop their discourse. Our education system is more narrative. It is more like “close your mouth, open your ears and listen and answer only when you’re asked to do so”. The UK system was more constructive, debate-based and the methodology in which lectures were organised was surprising. I participated in debates before, but these debates were very emotional and were not based in arguments or in professionalism. “*

(Interview with Rina, 2012)

In her reflection, Rina addresses the difference she encountered in communication at an international organisation at work and general communication culture in Kosovo. Although she perceived herself to have critical reasoning skills, she could not practice them fully in Kosovo due to the emotional charge in the Kosovo debating culture. In these two different practices, she realised that the education system in the UK develops the culture of debate through argumentation skills.

Engaging in discourse involves questioning ways of knowing and being. For example, when questioning the sources of information, participants faced problems because they were unable to contrast expert opinions or question expert knowledge. Even participants who considered themselves more prepared had difficulties positioning themselves in the scholarly community by questioning authors.

*How I remember it, like it or not, being a foreign student gives you enormous stress. You can’t even explain why that is happening to you. I was not sure if I was going to be successful. Will I be able to express my ideas clearly or as it is required? I was used to presenting ideas how they were presented by authors and not what I thought about them. In the first paper in Economics titled Why do firms exist. I often wanted to express my opinion, but I stopped myself because I*

*thought it was better to present something which was tested, or acknowledged by authors, normally properly referenced, and I hesitated to elaborate on my opinions on the topic. I know that the teacher suggested I write more on my opinion. So this gave me confidence, and I did not have problems with any of it after that.*

(Interview with Alisa, 2012)

As this narrative reveals, the writing process was not a problem because of technique or language, but because of inexperience with questioning the authority of the authors. Accepting that authors can be questioned is about positioning and expressing one's own opinion freely. This ability makes better performances possible and enables further reflective thinking. Reflection in this context involves reframing students' roles in the academic community.

Participants describe engagement in discourse as searching for their voice. For Ilir, finding his voice means finding a new means of expressing his creativity and voice and freeing himself from the pressure to be the best student:

*"I lacked the means to use my knowledge. I was a repeater without any creativity. I did not have the means to generate new ideas or at least work with ideas. I didn't know how you generate an idea, how you generate information or how you transform this in your own idea. I realised this only when I went abroad. I was not aware of this while I was here [in Kosovo]. ...I worked very hard on assignments. I tried to understand this new system of writing. I was reading papers and analysing them thoroughly. I was reading literature on how to write papers... ... I tried to create my style, my voice. They gave you the tools to come to this. So I got the maximum grade 15. I was the only one. I got this great confidence when I*

*did well. By the way, this is the only 15 that I got throughout my studies. It was a surprise, because I was the quietest person in class. No one expected this of me. I had confidence that I understood the success formula.*

*I stopped aiming to be the best like here in Kosovo. I wanted to get the most out of the UK in terms of experiencing other things in life, such as a soccer game, a concert, to understand the culture. I still managed to maintain merit level. I achieved balance between my studies and social life.”*

(Interview with Ilir, 2012)

Ilir’s narrative illustrates the learner identity transformation from mimicking to creating, by reflecting on his ways of knowing and being and by trying different ways based on expert models. This change can be interpreted as searching for balance through changing his relationship with learning.

The questioning process experienced by participants reveals not only constraints that may have influenced their ways of knowing, but also their ways of being in relationship with teachers and others. These constraints were mostly manifested in their fear of speaking up, openly expressing their own opinions, contradicting teachers and learning independently. This particularly influenced their participation in dialogue, either when debating with the literature or debating in class. Engaging in discourse enhances opportunities to question, change and create new meaning perspectives.

### **Performing a Student Role in Relationships**

When participants reflected on their roles, supportive environments and challenging but supportive teachers were important factors in the self-exploration process. Performing student roles represents the aspect of integration of participants as learners in the university environment in

relationship with others. Noticeably, participants do not report being discriminated or stigmatised in any way. On the contrary, they feel privileged as ‘best students’ in Kosovo, who made it to the UK through a competitive selection procedure. Additionally, their study fees, travel and costs of stay are covered by the scholarship, and therefore they do not consider themselves economically disadvantaged. They are usually in a group with other students from Kosovo, or in very diverse classes with students from different ethnicities and backgrounds. Therefore, the self-exploration centres on participants’ performance and negotiation of the student role at the university, through participation in university rituals and in the community of practice.

Findings from this study suggest that participants perform their student role in reciprocal relationships with peers, significant others and teachers. Most of the participants do not experience significant problems in relationship with peers. The data suggests a difference in disharmony for participants who are studying with a group from Kosovo, and for those who were alone. Data also suggests a difference in how students staying with family members or partners experienced study abroad compared to those who stayed in a student environment. The majority of participants negotiate their student role in relationships with teachers.

***Performing a Student Role in Relationship with Peers and Significant Others***

Participants that stayed with a group of Kosovan students reported less disorientation in performing their student role than those who did not. Most of the participants reported being in a group of two or three students from Kosovo. In one round of the Young Cell Scheme, 16 Kosovo students were enrolled in one university in four different departments. Participants reported developing and nurturing relationships with their peers from Kosovo. They also perceived their belongingness in the group as offering security, support and empathic rapport as they helped each other out on many occasions. Therefore, belonging to the group facilitated their adjustment and reinforced their student role through participation in joint learning and social activities.

Belonging to a group helps students share experiences and manage stress and challenges together. Talking to each other about the problems they were facing helped them realise that the problems were shared. Mezirow (1991) lists the realisation of shared experience as one of the stages in transformative learning. Participants that experienced this sharing of experiences reported lessened anxiety, which enabled them to deal with the problems they were encountering and reinforced their student role.

*It was quite difficult. But thanks to the fact that we were 6 students who went there we often met and discussed issues, we had a tight collaboration, e.g. we studied the econometrics assignments together, analysed the results.*

(Interview with Jorik, 2012)

For some participants, identity exploration was triggered when interacting in a diverse and competitive student community.

*“It was a very international environment. In my class there were Indians, Chinese, Greeks and students from 50 countries of the world. Maybe it isn’t a typical English school; it is one of the departments, which drew people from all over the world. I was the only one from Kosovo. I was the only one from the region and I knew that these people had been selected to attend the school, therefore I was reserved, knowing where I come from.”*

(Interview with Rron, 2012)

The competitive environment, and his perceived educational background, when analysing the student body in the programme, trigger Rron’s self-exploration. Being alone does not have the sharing element some other students reported having in which to discuss and cooperate in overcoming differences.

In a few cases, self-exploration is triggered by obligations students had for their family members and uneasiness felt in enacting a student role. For example, in the case of Jora who first arrived alone in the UK, but was later joined by her family, the settling in the city was not problematic because she had previously lived in London. Rather, she reported difficulties in juggling the roles of student and that of mother.

*“[Son] came later. [Husband] brought him to London. Visa issues were pretty much complicated. I came in September, and he joined me on the second week of November. I enrolled him in school. I took care of [Son] until May when [Husband] left his job in Kosovo to come and support me. I was a mother and a student. There were times I stayed awake for 36 hours straight. I was satisfied, and it was also interesting for [Son]. He was learning the language and this completely new system. It was too much for me. “*

(Interview with Jora, 2012)

Jora’s disorientation is triggered by her family’s visa complications that were not supported by the scholarship scheme and by the struggle in managing her roles as student and mother. When study abroad students have other roles, they struggle to maintain these roles efficiently. Disorientation may be caused because of distance if the family remains in the home country or complications if family members accompany them, as in Joras’s case. Support in managing the settling in of accompanying family members is not always availed from receiving institutions; other times available support may not be accessed. The disorientation in Jora’s case is triggered by her struggle to adjust fairly quickly in the student community and at the same time attend to her family obligations.

Relationships with significant others and peers were important for participants in performing their student role. As students, they wanted to

explore and experience new things, but at the same time, they feared failure and missed their family members and partners. Students who stayed with peers from Kosovo engaged in bonding, sharing and joint learning activities that helped them with any struggles in learning and being in a different environment. Married participants, and especially female students, reported struggles in managing the juggling roles of student and of parent and spouse. These relationships interfered with student role performance and attention to studies at times when they were required to deal with the demands of the accompanying family member. Nevertheless, support from family members was crucial for completing their studies. Relationships with peers and significant others are reported as important factors in the participants' ability to engage in the student community, as well as opportunities to get support and share experiences. However, in most of the cases, the disharmony was not reported as powerful enough to trigger significant crisis.

### ***Performing Student Roles in Relationships with Teachers***

Self-exploration while performing the student role in relationship with teachers is more activating in participants' understanding of their role as a student or a professional. Participants' prior experiences with authoritarian teachers in Kosovo as reported in Chapter 5: Shaping Learner Identities prevented them from asking questions, approaching teachers or asking for help. Participants reported that they were often misunderstood, as they would not speak up in class or answer questions. Alternatively, on different occasions, they would expect teachers to tell them if they were right or wrong. Therefore, in relationship with teachers, participants re-think their role as students.

Most of the participants describe teachers as supportive, accessible, friendly and humble and their self-exploration centres on figuring out how to behave and interact. For example, Ilir reveals:

*“They insisted on meeting more often. Even if you did not request a meeting, they would. They would not let you lose track. It is a different system. It is more dedicated. So from this*

*dedication I thought that they believed in this profession. They don't do it for salary alone. They do it for self-fulfilment and not for survival like is the case here in Kosovo. They were different. In Kosovo they used to mock us: "What do you know?" There you could not imagine a professor telling you: Nonsense, what do you know? In Kosovo they would kill creativity. If we would ask: "Could we do it differently? They would say: "NO, you don't know anything?". In the UK, your opinion matters. They ask you all the time: "What do you think?"*

(Interview with Ilir, 2012)

By conceptualising the teacher behaviour in the UK as professional, Ilir rethinks teacher and student roles. The constant engagement with students to express their own opinions triggers possibilities to be creative, curious and independent. Being asked all the time "What do you think?" represents a different frame than being asked to repeat what teachers say. Similarly, the student role in relationship to teachers is also elaborated by Leka's narrative.

*"There, the culture of communication is that of course you are free to speak and express your opinion but you must be prepared and speak in relation to the subject matter. In the long term, you improve your communication. After class, you can speak about different things. He can be your friend. So this relationship was completely different from what I experienced in Kosovo. [In UK], in class, they [teachers] make you feel you are a student. You could feel the difference. He is the professor and you are the student. You are here to study. However, in class the professor manages the class. "*

(Interview with Leka, 2012)

Self-exploration in Leka's narrative is triggered by conceptualising the teacher role in class and outside the class environment. The teacher's communicative approach is activating as it removes the barriers in communication, as well as promoting student engagement in class discussion. The role of the teacher as class manager, mentioned by Leka, refers to a different dynamic of teacher-student interaction. In the manager role, teachers expect students to be prepared so that they can discuss rather than just listen. This is particularly relevant at the graduate level, as seen with participants in this study.

Two participants in the study perceived limited support by research supervisors. Both cases involve high-ranking research universities<sup>56</sup>, and participants report busy research supervisors and expectations that students are independent in their research. As Fiona reveals:

*“Although in general everything was OK, professors were so busy that they would not care about students. For example, I finished my master's thesis without any help from my supervisor. I tried to meet my supervisor three times, even travelled to the UK after I finished my classes and had returned here[in Kosovo], and he did not meet me. I finished it and sent my final draft and he gave feedback only three days before the submission deadline. His feedback was like: what did you mean here, change this, and change that. I am convinced that this would not have happened to me here [in Kosovo]. “*

(Interview with Fiona, 2012)

Fiona's story is very insightful as she was taught in Kosovo during her undergraduate studies by the young generation of teachers who were part of

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<sup>56</sup> The ranking of the receiving university is based in Times Higher Education Rank List however the name of the institutions is not revealed due to easy identification of participants if pseudonyms and participant characteristics are matched with the name of the institution

the scholarship scheme programme themselves prior to returning to Kosovo and teaching. Fiona reported satisfactory relationships with teachers in Kosovo. Fiona was a participant who did not find support in the UK and returned to her teachers in Kosovo. They responded to her needs as friends and mentors.

However, Rina, who attended a highly ranked research university, expressed a similar concern about supervision. She explains:

*I have achieved a solid success but I think that I would have achieved more if I had a mentor to guide me when I was writing the thesis. I had a supervisor with whom I had two meetings. His role was to give a framework within which you had to work and that was it. He was gone in July. In August, they [supervisors] were already gone and you couldn't even reach them anymore. Therefore, you had to work more independently but I think that we lacked proper guidance from supervisors. I've heard that now, before starting to work on your thesis, you have to attend a 6-week course on thesis preparation and this course has a weight on the assessment of the thesis. But this didn't happen by the time that I was studying there. The students complained that the thesis preparation was too independent especially because the student population was so diverse with students coming from all parts of the world where they do not have the same education system."*

(Interview with Rina, 2012)

These experiences show that students had different experiences with teachers and supervisors and teacher or supervisor support was important in performing their student role. It also shows that understanding the student's background helps teachers to support international students. Teachers and institutions do not always acknowledge this, but it seems that the scholarship

agencies paid attention to this in most cases, and universities receiving students from these schemes addressed the student needs.

### Conclusion

Chapter 6-Transforming Learner Identities at the Boundaries explored identity work at the boundaries. In doing so, the research explored the main issues raised in the literature review on transformative learning and study abroad, such as triggering events in cross cultural learning, the role of critical reflection and transformative learning outcomes. The research suggests that participant's experience with difference created a space and possibility to engage in different learning activities, ways of learning, and disciplinary perspectives and discourses. Transformative learning as a learning experience is interpreted as one that challenges learners' ways of knowing, being and interacting, resulting in significant change in learning identity. Participants' engagement with the academic community at UK universities represents changing the frame in which participants perform as learners, leading to four main experiences: 1) *Being Overwhelmed*, 2) *Exploring the Student Role*, 3) *Questioning Personal Epistemology* and 4) *Performing Student's Role in Relationships*.

Disorientation or triggering events are considered a precursor step in Transformative Learning Theory, including literature covering cross-cultural learning. In the literature, disorientation is described as an emotionally activating event that brings about negative and positive feelings (Mezirow, 1991; Taylor and Cranton, 2013; Wong, 2008, Gu, 2009, Ritz, 2010, Erichsen, 2009, Alazzi and Chiodo, 2006). This research confirms the positive and negative dimensions of boundary experience during study abroad and further delineates the dimensions of boundary experience in terms of boundary ambiguity as disharmony, disorientation, discontinuity and other boundary factors (individual, institutional, interactional) to explain their influence on identity transformations. Findings from this research suggest that disorientation and discontinuity are more powerful in triggering identity transformations, concurring with other studies that

emphasise that transformations are triggered by disorientations in terms of discontinuity and disjuncture.

The way participants experience boundaries cannot be described as one event, but as a series of events happening at different levels and at different times. Participants report the initial encounter, recognised in the study abroad literature as ‘honeymoon’, as *Being Overwhelmed*, involving feelings of surprise, stress, and powerful emotions related to the experience of events, spaces and resources. It is suggested that being overwhelmed represents a disharmony experienced as positive and activating because of policies and practices that allowed for student participation, offered a welcoming and interactive environment and included varying learning activities. This implies that if participants would not have been welcomed or supported, as reported only in one case, this dimension would have changed. The suggestion is that, welcoming and conducive environments contribute to positive experiences even though practices may be challenging, demanding and requiring of a lot of effort, because these contribute to student participation and adjustment. When learners adjust to university settings and practices, they explore their role by trying to understand how things work and what is expected of them. The experience of being overwhelmed is reported as an adjustment process which is not so significant as to lead to transformations if it is not combined with role exploration, epistemology reframing and role performance.

Findings from this research suggest that role exploration is triggered by cultural capital mismatch, mainly in academic culture involving critical reading, critical thinking and reasoning and academic writing skills, language proficiency and discourse culture. This mismatch leads to disorientation and discontinuity creating a tension because of the need to quickly immerse oneself in the academic community. Although some of the scholarship schemes provided preparatory programmes and tutors to facilitate student participation, the quick need for immersion presented a problem for engagement due to the differences in how participants approached learning and how they engaged with writing and with the disciplinary conceptual knowledge. The most challenging activities reported by participants were writing papers, reading research articles, using the

library, non-traditional course structure, projects, placement and working in groups on assignments and engaging in disciplinary discourse. Negative experiences were triggered by study dynamics and expectations and by the problems learners faced to conceptualise theories, critically analyse literature, express themselves in writing and participate effectively in the disciplinary discourse. Exploring student roles describes the tension and dynamics of participation in the academic community through questioning ways of learning and negotiating meanings.

Participants reported that the most significant challenge in their participation was the reframing of their epistemology. The reframing involves questioning both contexts in trying to understand how their prior experience has influenced how they know and use knowledge (ways of knowing) and their roles as students and professionals (ways of being). This process includes questioning ways of knowing and participation in discourse. This implies an interaction with the academic practices and discipline, involving reflection, negotiation and action. These processes occur simultaneously with construing competences, beliefs and roles in interaction. Exploration and reframing continues whenever learners experience disorientation and discontinuity. Thus, through negotiating and construing meaning in action and interaction, learners reframe their epistemology.

Study abroad experiences can be explained through the concept of boundary crossing as coming to terms with their ways of learning and knowing and engaging with the discipline, advanced academic standards, accessible resources and services and with new student -teacher relationships. In other words, participants change their role as learners. They explore, change and perform their student roles throughout the process in relationship with others. Relationships that support participants' student role and allow them to participate regularly in university activities, contribute to overcoming disorientation. Supportive relationships with peers create a space where problems are shared. Relationships with teachers were the most significant to role redefinition and change as they offered a possibility to become different learners and create different relationships.

It must be emphasised that for participants in this study, acquiring new knowledge and skills was part of the study programme. The study programmes did not have transformative learning intentions and therefore represent an ordinary higher education context. It is also suggested that experiences may be interpreted and reinterpreted at other times of a learner's biography, thus allowing for a more gradual validation and negotiation of identity across contexts. Moreover, some participants experience both reshaping and reframing, depending on what dimensions are experiencing change in the process. Therefore, identity transformations are gradual and involve engagement and exploration with the community of practice, questioning ways of being, knowing and learning, and performing student roles through constant comparison of both contexts.

Participants' experience is influenced by internal and external factors. First, boundary experience depends on the personal characteristics of the students and their preparedness, prior to education, travel experience and commitment (Hermans and Pusch, 2004; Taylor, 1994; Wong 2008). Second, boundary experience depends on the differences between communities of practice. Findings suggested that participants exposed to previous emigration in the UK or other European countries or international working experience faced less disorientation. Nevertheless, in terms of epistemology, the transition to postgraduate studies that require higher critical reasoning skills and that promoted questioning and authorial self was present for the majority of participants, including those with previous travel and international work experience. The main factors contributing to identity transformations are engaging environments, acceptance of UK practices by participants, and student resilience to overcome challenges. Therefore, boundaries are experienced and crossed without planning but rather through engagement in the community of practice.

## **CHAPTER 7: INTEGRATING IDENTITY TRANSFORMATIONS ACROSS CONTEXTS**

This chapter seeks to explore participants' transformative learning study abroad outcomes and their integration in participants' professional life. While participants perceived the study abroad opportunity as a chance for personal and professional development, the expectations of the funding agencies were that scholarship beneficiaries contribute to institution building and modernisation. Although study programmes into which participants were enrolled did not have transformative intentions, the assumption of scholarship agencies is that the beneficiaries will contribute to social change in Kosovo by integrating their knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours in the workplace. This chapter interrogates these expectations by exploring the integration dynamics at the individual level and the institutional/societal, internal and external forces that influence integration.

Participants' integration into the Kosovo workplace after study abroad may be interpreted as a process of boundary crossing in which participants exercise the function of bridging two different practices through integrating and creating new boundary objects (Wenger, 1999; Akkerman and Bakker, 2011). According to Suchman (1994, cited in Akkerman and Bakker, 2011) boundary crossing represents the "process of transition and interactions across different sites" whereas boundary objects refer to "artefacts, documents, terms, concepts, and other forms of reification" integrated within or across sites (Wenger, 1998, p.105). Akkerman and Baker (2011) argue that boundary crossing involves a 'dialogicality' through which continuity and discontinuity is managed. In other words, while in the UK, participants negotiated difference and participated in the community of practice, and so it would be assumed that they will again negotiate difference and participate in the community of practice in Kosovo. According to Akkerman and Bakker (2011), this internal and external

dialectic makes integration a two-sided interaction in which different perspectives are negotiated and created.

Re-integration, according to Mezirow (2000, p.22) is the last step of the transformative learning process in which “learners re-integrate into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective” after a perspective transformation. This definition implies that re-integrating involves having the capacity to practice new ways of knowing when interacting with external forces in the individual's life. However, according to Mezirow (1991,p.152), despite obstacles, those who have experienced transformative learning do not regress to “levels of less understanding”. Mezirow (2009) argues that when learners experience risks in their social environments they make rational decisions not to act, thereby postponing integration. Illeris (2013) on the other hand, considers that regress is possible, especially when integration is overwhelming or difficult, ultimately pushing individuals to accept defeat. In analysing the interactional dynamics of individuals with other individuals, groups and external factors in institutional or wider contexts, findings from this study suggest that individual or group commitment and negotiation abilities are important factors in integration.

The interactional dynamics during re-integration are better expressed through the term *integration*, referring to having the capacity to make choices and transform reality (Freire, 1970, p.4). According to Freire, integration is different from adaptation, because the capacity to transform reality is different from the capacity to adjust (Freire, 1973, p.4). Adjusting means accepting other conditions or realities instead of acting on preferred choices, values, beliefs and possible future worlds. Integration involves negotiating identity change with others in context and across contexts, and putting into practice re-shaped or transformed identity. In practical terms, having the capacity to act entails having possibilities to make decisions, implement changes, influence others and get support. In this way, integration is more than overcoming. Integration can be rather interpreted as an ongoing process of becoming across contexts. Integration may take time, depending on the level of support and conflict participants' experience.

Transformative Learning is described as a development process that increases the ability and experience of learners for reflectivity, self-awareness, context, assumptions and perspective analysis and authenticity (Mezirow, 1991, p.161). Mezirow claims:

“Perspective transformation involves: a) an empowered sense of self, b) more critical understanding of how one’s social relationships and culture have shaped one’s beliefs and feelings and c) more functional strategies and resources for taking actions. Taking action is an integral dimension of transformative learning”

(Mezirow, 1991, p.161)

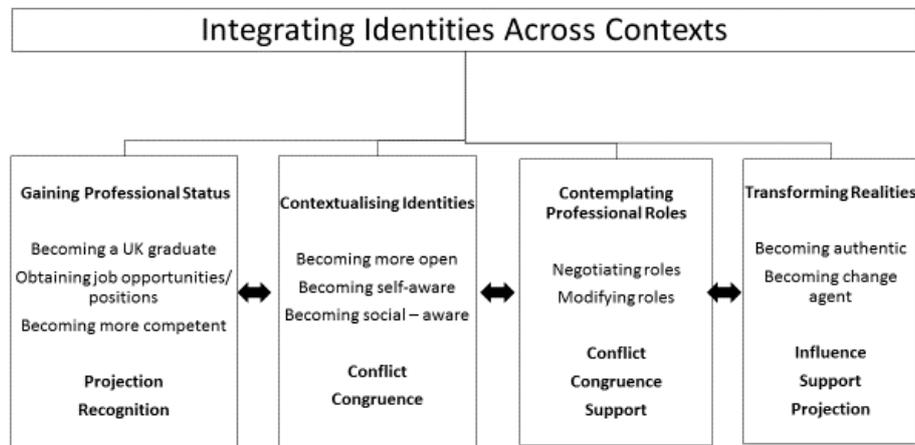
As in shaping and exploring identities, there are individual differences in the integration trajectory. Participants experience a spectrum of integration with varying degrees of positive and negative outcomes. In general, when participants were asked to express how they have changed, they expressed it as becoming “more open”, “more responsible”, “proactive”, “independent”, “more competent”, “cooperative”, “confident”, “voiced”, “critical” and “authentic” learners. As transformative learning is a process, the outcomes should be viewed not as achievements or fixed results, but rather as changes with reshaping and reframing potential in the identity of learners. In other words. *Becoming* Learners across contexts implies possibilities for learners to reflect on experience and engage in further reshaping or reframing after their study abroad experience, and whenever experiencing boundaries in integration.

The distinct processes identified from participants’ narratives are discussed in four themes:

- 1) Gaining Professional Status
- 2) Contextualising Identity
- 3) Contemplating Professional Roles
- 4) Transforming Realities

The presentations and analysis of narratives will depict experiences of participants that illustrate the category, although different participants

experience different dimensions of categories. Figure 23 presents the categories:



**Figure 24 Integrating Identities across Contexts**

### **Gaining Professional Status**

Gaining Professional Status refers to identity gains resulting from study abroad experience in terms of positions availed and knowledge, skills, attitudes and values gained in the UK academic community of practice. When participants return home they come with a changed ‘biographical baggage’ (Kiely, 2005. p.9) and foreign qualifications to integrate in the labour market. Availing a foreign qualification and human capital, participants may be seen as creating cultural capital with which they integrate in the Kosovan society. They are perceived as ‘bridging practices’ as in bringing practices from the UK to introduce innovation, or ‘dividing practices’, as in engaging in practices that are different from their colleagues in the workplace(Wenger, 1999). During integration they create new procedures, methods, vocabulary and discourse that may be interpreted as ‘boundary objects’ representing their new perspective (Wenger, 1999). Findings suggest that when participants return home they frequently experience a more developed or new sense of self because of professional and differentiation status: These are expressed in two categories: Becoming a UK graduate and becoming more competent.

***Becoming a UK Graduate***

After successfully completing their postgraduate studies, participants returned to Kosovo with a strengthened or new sense of self. They gained an identity dimension with a label of UK graduate, returnee and international student, accompanied by feelings of belonging to a wider international community. Faced with a large number of highly skilled returnees, political parties, institutions and companies targeted them in order to add expertise to their ranks. In some cases, participants had agreements to return to their job and in some cases, the scholarship obliged employment at the public institutions. Very often, these graduates are hired to important positions and promoted in the media as experts. On some occasions, they are resisted by their peers, who perceived them as more privileged and felt there was discrimination in employment (UNDP, 2006; Young Cell Scheme, 2015). For example, Linda and Arbnor explain their feelings upon return in terms of their personal valuation.

*I feel like I belong to a larger community/international community, more valuable and socially responsible to implement my experience.*

(Interview with Linda, 2012)

*My return was triumphant. I got a master's degree. I got confidence in myself, because during my studies there was a risk of failure. I came back to my previous work. I started to include my experience in my work. ... I felt far more competent. I had more confidence in writing reports. I was better at doing research, collecting and analysing data. I cannot really compare it with my previous work because I had a very short working experience. I was a junior assistant. I did not take any serious work. I only assisted others. When I returned I was engaged in projects. I was leading projects and I was successful.*

(Interview with Arbnor, 2012)

The majority of participants gain higher status by gaining quick employment or promotion to executive positions. Besides personal valuation, employers also valued their qualifications. Participants' profiles in Table 8 confirms that all participants are employed and shows workplace changes, promotions and gaining status of public figures, which is defined as public opinion maker through contributions in the media, scholarship activity, activism or high public office duties, such as Members of Parliament, Minister, Deputy minister or other public office duty.

Table 9 Employment Status, Workplace Changes and Promotion

Nr	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Level	Prior Workplace	Returning Workplace	Workplace Change 1	Workplace Change 2	Workplace Change 3	Related to Specialisation	Promotion
1	Engjell	34	M	MA	Public Institution	Public Institution				NR	NO
2	Ylka	24	F	MA	None	Private Business				NR	NO
3	Alisa	28	F	MA	Public Institution/NGO	Kosovo Government	NGO			NR	NO
4	Rron	32	M	MA	International Organisation	International Organisation	Kosovo Government	University, NGO		R*	YES
5	Rina	35	F	MA	International Organisation	Think Tank	Kosovo Government	Think Tank		R*	YES
6	Jora	38	F	MA	International Organisation	Own Business				R*	YES
7	Blend	36	M	MSc/ PhD	Financial Sector/ Private	International Organisation	Kosovo Government	Financial Sector/ Private	Public HE	R	YES
8	Leka	32	M	MSc/ PhD	Financial Sector/ Private	Financial Sector/ Private	Private College, NGO/Research	International Organisation		R	YES
9	Arbnor	28	M	MSc/ PhD	NGO/Research	NGO/Research	Private College	International Organisation		R	YES
10	Jorik	33	M	MSc	Financial Sector/ Public	Financial Sector/ Public				R	YES
11	Donika	24	F	MSc	Financial Sector/ Private	Financial Sector/ Public				R	NO
12	Doni	29	M	MA	Kosovo Government	Kosovo Government				R	NO
13	Fiona	23	F	MSc	None	Kosovo Government	NGO/Research	Private Business		NR	NO
14	Illir	29	M	MSc/ PhD	NGO/Research	NGO/Research	Private College			R*	YES
15	Linda	40	F	PhD	Public University/ NGO	Public University/ NGO				R*	YES
16	Vlera	30	F	MA	International Organisation	Kosovo Government	International Organisation	Political Organisation		R*	YES
Notes:											
YCS-Young Cell Scheme											
CHEV-Chevening											
OSI/STAFF-OSI/Staffordshire University											
R-Related to Specialisation											
NR- Not related to Specialization											
* - Public figure (opinion maker, high ranking government official, successful business, member of parliament)											

As the table 8 illustrates, eight participants returned to their old jobs, two of them became employed for the first time and six participants availed of other job opportunities in the government, international organisations and the private sector. The high percentage in public sector employment is due

to contract obligations and to the ability of participants to gain higher positions in government or public higher education institutions. There are also combinations of fulltime jobs with teaching jobs, either at public or private higher education institutions, implying that some of the participants have access to more than one job at times. Participants have also changed jobs and advanced in their careers. Some of them also became public figures, secured important management positions or became opinion makers. Seven participants pursued PhD studies in European countries; four of them pursued their PhD studies in the UK in part time mode. In a country with a 45% unemployment rate, this finding suggests that gaining higher status as ‘UK graduates’ is a direct outcome of study abroad scholarships.

### ***Becoming More Competent***

Becoming more competent describes outcomes in terms of new knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour. Increased competences, besides knowledge and skills (know what), include changes in the learner epistemology (know how), identification in the discipline, and student/researcher or professional role (way of being). Although all participants report higher-level outcomes in critical thinking, writing skills, language skills, and the reframing dimension is more pronounced in nine cases. The majority of participants also indicated that their intention was to contribute to the development of the country, thus assigning to themselves increased competences for the workplace.

Becoming more competent has a transformative dimension in that it reframes strategies for future engagement. For example, Blend reflects on his practice:

*Something that I feel has changed is illustrated by a saying in English “the more I learn, the more I realise how much I don’t know”. As much as I have learned there [in UK], I have lost the exact determination or the exact qualification for something. When I went there [in the UK], I used to say: this stands for this and there is no other way. There [in the UK] I saw that there are 50 other things, which I simply didn’t understand or I just didn’t include in the equation of the*

*problem, which I dealt with. My whole point of view has changed as a result of what I've done.*

(Interview with Blend, 2012)

For Blendi becoming more competent involved changing his point of view about what knowledge and learning are. Blend describes it as change from being categorical to analytical and reflective as he engages in further testing and questioning of his perspective. When changing his ways of writing, Blend necessitated time to get actively engaged. He considered that he did not have enough time, because learning how to write was not only a technical problem, but reframing his way of thinking and creating a writing culture. According to him, this outcome has to be maintained continuously.

*They wanted to teach us in two weeks what we were supposed to learn here in 12 years, the lack of proper education and how to explicate a problem in writing. This was reflected in my exam where I got 11 out of 13 because of writing problems. This problem doesn't disappear. It has been a while since I think and write in English, still I notice that mistakes appear in the material and these are the consequences of a yearlong socialisation in a certain system.*

(Interview with Blend, 2012)

Blend's narrative illustrates change as a continuous process where the learner acts on the new perspective through implementing new knowledge, skills and perspectives. Mezirow (1991) identified in the transformative learning process three stages, which have a function of role reinforcement through 1) acquisition of knowledge and skills; 2) provisional role trying and 3) gaining confidence. Mezirow also recognises that taking another perspective is reinforced with reading and writing (Mezirow, 1991.p.192).In terms of integrating new practices in the Kosovo context, Akerman and Bakker (2011) when explaining 'boundary crossing individuals' suggested that they may develop and reinforce "in between

practices”, ‘hybrid practices’ or “transformed practices”. For Blend, writing in English has changed the framework in which he performs. Blend’s narrative may be interpreted as switching to a different cultural framework through practice reinforcement after he returns to Kosovo. Being more critically aware of differences in the writing culture offers a realisation that he needs to reinforce that practice.

Other participants report increased competences in the discipline accompanied with disciplinary language reframing. They maintain that thinking, writing and speaking in English does not present an automatic switch in engaging in discourse in Albanian language and professional local context. On their return, participants report struggling to find Albanian words to express their professional knowledge and concepts based on their new perspectives and engage actively in finding and creating new professional vocabulary in their discipline.

*For example, “gender mainstreaming”. How many times have we debated about the meaning of this word in Albanian and finding the Albanian term for it...? For example when I came back, I asked myself “how am I going to explain women empowerment to people. I was challenged but in general, I focused on framing the meaning in legal terms.*

*(Interview with Rina, 2013)*

*The problem is that for one year you are only dealing with English. When I tried to improve my English expression I reduced expression in Albanian. When you don’t read and write in a certain language then you start forgetting them [expressions, terms] ... most of the words already fixed in my head are in English language, and I tried to find the adequate term in Albanian.*

*(Interview with Donika, 2013)*

In Kosovo, after the war, because of the international presence, many new words from the English language were introduced and later appropriated within practice or discipline. New vocabulary served as a tool to communicate meanings of the new business or theoretical concepts and bridge professional and culture differences between contexts. In turn, this requires higher cognitive and analytical skills to communicate and validate disciplinary language and meanings in order to integrate them. Different from the international community administrators who had their contextual perspective and worked in English language, participants have both UK and Kosovo perspectives and try to bridge the meaning making through both English and Albanian language, as they work to solve problems in context.

Becoming more competent motivates participants to introduce new practices through applying competences in the workplace. In their job roles, they introduce new methodologies and approaches in trying to improve existing practices. However, these new practices may remain outside the usual domain and thus become resisted by people attached to traditional practices. As Don's narrative illustrates:

*I try to do more than I am required to. I have directly applied skills I obtained from the European studies field and I am able to debate, present and discuss better. I have practiced debating skills in my studies [in Kosovo] but in the UK I further developed communication skills.... I also introduced new methodologies. We [colleagues] tried a new approach to produce measurable objectives for X institution... Me and my team did a review of X Ministry and the idea was to make specific objectives and propose activities in terms of time, indicators based on measures and prior data before intervention. We evaluated legislative plan so that we can determine how many laws the ministry can approve, improve or change during a three year period. Unfortunately, all our*

*work was not taken into consideration because the minister said: “this is good, but we cannot change objectives and they anyway do not differ from old ones.” ...It may be different with other ministries where they [ministers] understand this competence. So they [public] say that government institutions are not capable to implement new approaches. Mainly the opportunity to push new ideas probably exists within our office, which is a good thing for the director, my colleagues and me but this is a bit harder outside the office.*

(Interview with Don, 2013)

Don’s narrative suggests that increased competences raise ambitions to solve institutional problems by introducing new methodologies and approaches. His initiative is accepted by his team who develop the proposal for higher-level decision-making. However, competences alone do not provide opportunities for integration. Production of new rules, forms, and methodologies as “boundary objects” moving from the UK context to the Kosovo context may not be understood or accepted in the workplace. Existing practices are changed if there is a will to accept new practices. This is not achieved automatically. Integration involves interaction between practices, and participants bridging efforts may not always be successful.

### **Contextualising Learner Identities**

Becoming aware of learning constraints and engaging in self-exploration to overcome constraints has engaged learners in re-interpreting their roles as students and as professionals. On returning home, participants report a contextualising process, which increases their self and social awareness. While self-exploration initiated in the UK involved questioning ways of knowing and being, integration of a transformed identity in Kosovo involves grounding and connecting the experience across contexts and is expressed through two themes: Becoming More Open and Self-Aware and Becoming More Critically Aware.

***Becoming More Open and Self-Aware***

Becoming more open and self-aware refers to a more developed or new sense of self. Participants share becoming more open with others and with other perspectives. However, there are individual dimensions of the reshaping and reframing of learner identities associated with transformative learning. For some, self-awareness contributed to strengthening their sense of self or to further shaping as a natural gradual process. New academic practices and writing skills are rather assimilated in the form of gradual building of competences, thus not involving significant changes in their ways of being and ways of knowing. This implies that although writing practice and critical thinking were not a well-developed academic practice in Kosovo, those that had prior preparation in writing and had experienced engaging pedagogies and professional development experiences, transformed meaning schemes (professional knowledge and procedures) but did not change the frame in which they operated. In other cases, writing was perceived only as a technique and the study abroad experience as extending the ability to analyse and express opinion better. Self-reflection engaged a comparison of contexts and assumptions, contributing to self-awareness, but did not always engage a reorganisation of the meaning framework. Reshaping can be illustrated with Jorik's narrative below:

*“When I worked for X institution I was also equipped with additional skills which I gained at work and the international advisors helped us a lot. We always organised conferences, meetings, discussions...In the UK I didn't face any difficulties, unlike my colleagues. I considered myself of a higher level in comparison to them concerning the courses we had. Of course, it required engagement, especially the econometrics course.*

*I am able to do better research than I've done before. Before we went there [in the UK], we didn't even know how to write an essay properly. Nevertheless, about viewpoints or attitudes, I wouldn't say that I've changed, except for the fact that I became more engaged and more active. My thesis was more about adding words to numbers”.*

(Interview with Jorik, 2012)

Jorik does not seem to have experienced significant change in the way he thinks about knowledge and his profession. He improved his language skills, writing skills and research skills and became more active as a person. However, Jorik negotiated meanings about his profession and discipline before studying abroad during numerous trainings he received at work. During the disorientation phase in the UK, Jorik mainly dealt with language and writing problems and adjustment to academic practices. Having had strengths in maths and some eight years working experience, his experience has strengthened his confidence and communication skills.

Participants' experience of simultaneous learner identity reshaping and reframing provides insight in the transformation of meaning perspectives as a system. Transforming meaning schemes in one dimension does not automatically trigger changes in learners' epistemology. For example, Fiona's narrative provides an example of how changing relationships with family members and gaining confidence contribute to becoming more open to other experiences, rather than changing learner epistemology.

*I changed. I was very dependent on my family. I realised that I am able to do things alone and do not need anyone to hold my hand. I realised that I could live anywhere no matter where I would go. I sort of got to know another part of myself, another Fiona, who is confident, not scared, ready to face any challenge...*

*So again, you are more independent and they just draw some boundaries or show you the way you should do it or what is expected from you. I cannot say concretely, but I have noticed that the way I see and think about things has changed; how I approach certain situations; I analyse things much more now and I pay special attention to details. I know that I have*

*created this habit in the UK; probably these things also change when you get older and when you have more experience, but for me study abroad experience has speeded up these changes.*

(Interview with Fiona, 2012)

Although Fiona uses change vocabulary in her narrative, she seems to experience the change as additions to her identity that come with maturity and a higher level of education. However, recognising that she can be independent provides a meaning framework, which gives her confidence to live alone and anywhere and become more open to different experiences.

Another example of becoming more open in terms of strengthening selves is Rina, who had expressed gender beliefs before going to the UK. She considers the process of change during her study abroad as a realisation, positioning and transforming her beliefs.

*“It was very interesting and challenging, especially the gender theory, until I realised that it was western-centric. Because I had a debate and a war with myself and I thought, “Come on this couldn’t be the only truth.” In fact, there are too many facts, truths and methods of how you can present something...*

*.. I needed time and at the end, I realised that they [teachers/authors] began from their personal experiences and failed to integrate cultural differences. They discuss them and they understand them but they think that their cultural beliefs about gender are the best ... this is why I thought that it has a flavour of post colonialism. They [teachers/authors] also need time to be more acceptable towards other experiences and theories. You definitely need time to define and position yourself and I found this to be a bit frustrating, probably I was a rebel without a cause and I don’t know why, but it took me*

*some time to understand it. But when I realised that this was also one of the theories it has made me more open and more tolerant and perhaps this coexistence of theories in academia transformed the way I approached my studies...*

*I might say that there is a combination of both factors: my previous work experience and the study abroad experience. I managed to reach a balance between the academic and professional world and between Kosovo and the International context.”*

(Interview with Rina, 2012)

It is clear that Rina learned to become more open to other perspectives although she did not change her beliefs about gender. In terms of transformative learning outcomes, she positions herself in ways that are meaningful for her, after consideration of alternatives and biases. In terms of integration, she bridges academic content and approaches with the professional work and bridges the international aspects in the Kosovo context.

As participants describe it, transformation is a process and continues after they come back in Kosovo. Ilir's narrative illustrates this ongoing process.

*In Kosovo my economic beliefs were left oriented. I believed in equal distribution of wealth no matter what. During my studies I embraced the Kenzian school beliefs and I moved from the extreme left. Now I have become entirely liberal. I think this is typical for someone who builds his own philosophy. So I moved from left to right, and this is a philosophy that I now promote. Free market economy, economic liberalism. So this is a result of studying in the UK. But this was not dictated to me. So I made a choice based on what I have read, heard and seen and embraced what I thought to be compatible with my new*

*beliefs. Now I truly believe in this. Therefore, this possibility to create my opinion and not take things for granted I think contributes to my creativity. So I constructed my own belief and I am sure that if I would have stayed in Kosovo I would have taken things communicated to me, taken them for granted, whereas in the UK I constantly analysed different approaches and I had the right to choose my beliefs based on facts.*

(Interview with Ilir, 2012)

For Ilir the move away from rote learning was more than a technique, it was freedom from assigned meaning from authority figures such as teachers and authors. In the UK, he constructed his own beliefs through a process of analysing different approaches in a free and conducive environment. Similar to Ilir, several other participants embraced different schools or approaches in their discipline independently, and they developed the capacity to accept others' beliefs even though they disagree.

### ***Becoming More Critically Aware***

Becoming more critically aware refers to gaining more developed or new perspectives regarding social reality. Participants' disorientation and self-exploration, as discussed in Chapter 6: Transforming Learner Identities at the Boundaries, contributed to changing lenses for viewing themselves, their professions and the world. Competence building increased possibilities for participants to implement knowledge, tools and methods and to approach and solve problems. However, becoming more critically aware may result in barriers to integration because of the difficulties in applying the newly gained perspectives or inactively and meaningfully engaging in their professional practice. When participants take positions in Kosovo institutions, they become aware of how these institutions work by explicating problems they face during integration. When assuming their positions in institutions, their new perspectives increased awareness of ethics, culture and politics in Kosovo. The difference is not in how institutions work, but how they see their role in them.

Vlera captures the process of becoming more competent and critically aware about the ethics of political processes based on ethnic identity. Increased competences about the European Union, human rights and international relations, also increased her awareness of how Kosovo interacts with these issues. When Vlera returned to her previous job in the local government, she faced ethical and cultural dilemma that pushed her to leave her job and reorient her participation in the political process. She realised that some values that are promoted as European values are actually misinterpreted by the international community in Kosovo for the sake of politics. Their impact was not compatible with her values and beliefs anymore. She explains:

*As much as this experience has helped me to develop myself personally- at the same time, I was stuck, because when you become part of the processes within the government and can in theory make a difference between how things are and what was actually happening. You become a participant, feeling guilty for being a part of a process which is harmful and the nation wasn't aware of that. This tortured me. Trust me, for a while, I was frustrated because I was a part of a team which was developing harmful processes... We created new municipalities based on ethnic principles. At the same time, I saw the role of the individual in the process for example, how a minister, who doesn't even have sufficient political power and is not firm towards the international bodies in Kosovo, made decisions that were unfair to the majority of the Kosovan people, and my inability to do anything about it.*

(Interview with Vlera, 2012)

Her role in the local government was no longer a simple one. Becoming more competent and critically aware may be interpreted here as being awakened and politically emancipated. Therefore, although Vlera did

not experience major disorientation in the UK, she was motivated by feelings of guilt and concern for others to understand the meaning of her experiences.

While exercising her role and trying to challenge political processes, Vlera further experienced age and gender discrimination. She explains:

*When I finished the Master's degree I was 26 years old and they thought "come on you're a woman, what would you possibly know?!" Even though I tried to present arguments and concepts they replied, "What do you know about politics in here?" which isn't right because you might not have the necessary experience but they didn't even consider my ideas. This is why I felt frustrated.*

(Interview with Vlera, 2012)

Having increased awareness and competences did not result in automatic integration. While she negotiates meanings through arguments, her role is downplayed through emphasising her young age and gender. Experiencing conflict with the work processes and her role in them, Vlera leaves public service, joins a political organisation and becomes a Member of Parliament to oppose Kosovo political organisation based on ethnic division. Similarly, other participants perceive that gaining positions and having increased competences, makes them more critically aware. Thus, the transformative dimension of study abroad outcomes entails contemplating professional trajectories with a broader view of self, professional role and social realities in Kosovo.

### **Contemplating Professional Trajectories**

Participants' narratives reveal that understanding and acting upon new perspectives and facing barriers engages them in contemplating their professional trajectories. Trajectory is defined by Wenger (1998, p.154) as "a continuous motion-one that has momentum of its own in addition to a

field of influences. It has coherence through time that connects the past, the present and the future”. It is suggested that transformative learning outcomes are not only a change in meaning perspectives; they also have impact on professional orientation and practice. Changing professional beliefs is important for future professional identity because beliefs influence how one performs (Tickle, 2005). As beliefs are constructed in interaction, the participants reshape or reframe their beliefs and their roles in the UK; however, their integration happens only when they integrate in the Kosovo context.

Contemplating professional trajectories involves evaluation of identity congruence and conflict. This process is reflective as it builds from projecting and contextualising to positioning. Projecting means to develop an idea where you want to be in the future, involving intentions and imagination (Jenkins, 2008; Wenger, 1999). Contextualising means creating an increased understanding for self-location. Positioning means role taking in the institution based on status and competence and in relationship with other colleagues through role negotiation and modification. Findings suggest two categories in the process of Contemplating Professional Trajectories: Negotiating Professional Roles and Modifying Professional Roles.

#### ***Negotiating Professional Roles***

When participants take new roles in the workplace they engage in negotiation of how the professional role is performed in Kosovo based on their new perspective. According to Jenkins (2008, p.93)“individuals negotiate their identities within the interaction order,” thus requiring negotiation ability that corresponds to specific situations with which individuals interact. This implies that negotiation is dependent on situational context, interactional methods and role management. Roles are performed within relationships and systems and as such an individual can have more than one role, and therefore undertake different negotiating strategies for different roles.

When assuming a professional role, participants who were working in the same job as before going to the UK or in the same discipline, negotiate with colleagues as to how the role is practiced and try to create their own practice based on the negotiated perspective. In other cases, participants are introduced for the first time to a role or profession through the scholarship contract and they contemplate whether that role fits with their professional goals. So rather than just taking a job, they seek self-realisation and meaningful engagement and take into consideration other principles such as autonomy or ethics.

Leka's contemplation of his professional trajectory illustrates role negotiation accompanied by conflict, regression, accommodation and agency that depended on the situation and a role that leads to changing his intentions.

*I was very confused. I felt like my brain had experienced some sort of expansion. I mean I had a wider view on many issues. I returned to work and the first shock I experienced was the conversations I had with my friends. It seemed to me that while they had remained the same, I had changed. In a way, I even felt disinterested in what they were saying, as if I did not fit in. It took me one month to switch back to a Kosovo way of doing things. But it was one moment that hit me. I was in a meeting, when I realised that I needed to make a shift....*

(Interview with Leka, 2012)

The confusion and conflict Leka experiences at work are based on the change he experienced. He clearly categorises it as a cognitive and behavioural gain, which caused problems with fitting in because he realised that what he was doing represented a conflict with his changed self. Upon return, his gains are not easily accepted as he is pushed to return to his old ways of doing things in order to accommodate. Mezirow (1991) contended that those who experience transformative learning do not regress. In fact,

Leka's narrative reveals imposed temporary regression, due to lack of support and cooperation in the workplace. However, the regression is temporary, because he realises that he could not go back to what he was before and as a result leaves his job and changes his intentions.

The intensity of negotiation depends on the external factors that affect integration. In his new job, Leka found himself validating his new sense of self with students, colleagues and management. He became employed in a higher education institution as lecturer and researcher, and performed two different roles related to the discipline he studied in the UK. He explains:

*The first thing I did was to establish proper relationships in the classroom. I tried to be accessible, supportive and open to students, but at the same time demanding and right to the point when it came to responsibilities. In terms of my engagement in research, I tried to maintain quality of work and manage the project well when I was project manager. I was more attentive to ethical issues and the way the final product was prepared.*

(Interview with Leka, 2012)

Leka is agentic in taking the teaching role based on his new perspective. He tries to change relationships with students and at the same time to explicate academic standards so that he is not misunderstood. Attending to his behaviour may be interpreted as being able to manage the role of the teacher and researcher. However, he continues to negotiate his role within the institution where there are other dynamics involved and where change is more gradual.

*Well, I'm not convinced that I alone can change the world. What I changed, or where I see having a role is in the teaching process. I can see myself evolving and being true to my beliefs. In other things I see my contribution as a little piece in the*

*mosaic. I truly believe that with small pieces from other people too we can change something. ...*

*Now, you know how it is here! [In Kosovo] I see it like I am on a highway, where I am very certain where I want to go. Unlike modern highways, here you have many obstacles, holes and people crossing over. Because I know where I'm heading I am comfortable passing through these obstacles. That is because I feel like I belong here for the moment. I don't know for how long I'm going to be here. I really feel that I am among people like me. The other thing I do is that I don't expect people to tell me what to do. Some of the things, such as schedule, I take it up in my way. So they just accept my way, and do not bother me. It is like saying this is how Leka is; he does it his way. Not that everyone else has that privilege. I did some work in the UK and there when you take some work, it comes with reasonable time and responsibility. So you are not rushed like here. You are trusted, and at the same time, you have certain independence in how you deal with the work. Here, it is not like that.*

(Interview with Leka, 2012)

Leka's metaphor of a highway with 'holes' and 'people crossing over' may be interpreted as barriers in the workplace. Although he negotiates his role within the culture of the institution, he fits in because he has a clear vision for his professional development trajectory. He rationalises his choices, opportunities and threats and reaches a balance through some acts of complacency (not challenging authority) and some acts of conditioning (adopting a flexible schedule). In a way, he changes his rebel strategy towards self-realisation through negotiation and through coordinating joint actions with other people with whom he shares beliefs. Leka illustrates very clearly the negotiation of different roles and the search for places where he can be true to himself.

Negotiation contributes to change maintenance which according to the Prochaska and DiClemente (1986) model, is about stabilising behaviour change and engaging actions. Participants describe negotiation as a tool to contemplate professional trajectories. According to Bramming (2007), transformation as an outcome and process of transformative learning is about “managing the transformation” of the individual in an embedded context that involves continuous conflicts. Thus, transformation is not only the ability to change oneself, but also the ability to master the environment in which transformative practice takes place (Bramming, 2007, p. 49). This means that the individual tries to reinforce his/her practices while at the same time negotiates meaning with others. Negotiating professional roles means enacting transformational outcomes with varying degrees of success depending on context.

#### ***Modifying Professional Roles***

Modifying Professional Roles results from career goal and role/work opportunity incongruence. The role conflict pushes participants to modify their professional roles through further development and career reorientation. At times, when participants enter the labour market, the modification is a process of role formation. There are cases where career goals are in conflict with career opportunities offered by scholarship contracts or work availability for a specific specialisation.

Fiona’s and Alisa’s employment in public administration illustrate professional role modification resulting from role conflict. They describe their employment as being trapped in what they call the “invented posts” from the government to fit in the Young Cell Scheme beneficiaries’ profile. Both Fiona and Alisa found their employment to be an artificial recognition and empowerment, rather than a gain, because it did not match with their qualification abroad. Fiona explains:

*F: I was senior officer for EU Assistance. This post was invented when they decided to take me. They made a job description by taking one duty from one person and one from*

*another. So they created this new post, which resulted in being unsuccessful. I just stayed there and did nothing for two months. ... In this office we were all scholarship beneficiaries. They were dedicated... They were all hardworking people and successful. Now successful, I mean they were 25 or so, too early to say successful. So I was similar to them, ambitious. In three or four offices there were only three people that did not study abroad. I mean 97 % were this type of people. I can tell you that during my two months experience at the Ministry I did not complete a single task from beginning to the end. There was nothing to do.*

**B:** *So what did you do?*

**F:** *I could not work at anything serious there. Now that I changed my job, I am trying to implement new methods. But this is a new job. And here too, there are other people who have studied abroad.*

(Interview with Fiona, 2012)

The Kosovo government was obliged to employ the Young Cell Scheme scholarship beneficiaries. As there were as many as thirty per year, they were mainly accommodated in the office for European integration or other government offices and agencies. In Fiona's case, rather than just having a job, she is interested in engaging with her profession. She left her job despite her contract obligations, arguing that the job was holding back her professional development. However, as these are her first jobs she continues to search for a job that is relevant for her.

Alisa on the other hand had already changed careers when she decided to study environmental management. As one of the seven environment specialists benefiting from the EU Young Cell Scheme, she got a contract as a senior officer for European integration. Although her role with coordination responsibilities with the European Commission office

was not related to her specialisation, she kept this position for three years to fulfil her contract obligation. Her dilemmas about the ability to integrate knowledge and skills in Kosovo became a reality even after leaving the public sector:

*A: I could not apply for anything from my field. ..I could apply a different [laughing] institutional approach, because our public institutions have many problems. I was more committed and more precise in respecting deadlines, in reporting and in cooperating with colleagues. But these are linked also with individual formation outside the education sphere. I received comments like: I like the way you are notifying us, inviting us, or your communication.*

*B: Were there problems?*

*A: Problems? Too many. [Laughing] You know how politicised a community we are? Up to the last cell? You always had to think what effect your action will have. Who will be affected? Now I did not have any decision making responsibility, but I had to make sure that I was in line with the political atmosphere. For example, if you wanted to initiate something you had to speak with the right person not in the hierarchy, institution wise, but who has more political weight in the Ministry,*

*B: To take initiative?*

*A: Or just to have things done.*

(Interview with Alisa, 2012)

In Alisa's case, her skills were valued, however she was not meaningfully engaged. For Alisa, this is the second time that her education in an underrepresented field failed to engage her meaningfully in the workplace or in her professional specialisation, which, in her case resulted in alienation. The inability to work in the field of specialisation is mainly a

result of a mismatch between, on one hand, policies to establish an education programme and enrol students in a particular field and on the other hand, recruitment strategies, resulting in a lack of coordination in implementing programmes that are identified as needed for the country. Environmental Management was not considered relevant for business or other management positions, and for this reason, Alisa enrolled in another international distance master programme in management to strengthen her career prospects.

In Alisa's practice, the limitations she faces go far beyond individual commitment. She is labelled an environmentalist because environmental issues are not a priority in Kosovo. Her raised awareness about the environment makes her realise how difficult it is to change cultural and structural problems. She explains:

*I am more aware of the consequences of my behaviour in relation to the environment. I am more vigilant and careful....People are very aggressive towards the environment. There are positive cases when others imitate my behaviour, but there are cases when people joke with me saying HUH the environmentalist. They do not do it intentionally, but they are not ready themselves to give up bad practices. But I see change. We are not at a point where nothing is moving. Things are moving but very slowly.*

(Interview with Alisa, 2012)

Although Alisa is dissatisfied with not practicing her profession, she acknowledges that changes are happening slowly. She also acknowledges her influence on others in simple measures, yet recognises that changing the culture and the approach towards the environment needs time. She left the government to work as a project manager in an NGO because she could gain financial advantage with other transferable skills acquired in the UK. It was the intention of the Young Cell Scheme to implement systemic change

in the public administration through employment of these young people educated abroad. The impact of the young cells in the mainstream is described by Alisa as a structural problem, thus qualifying as a political and cultural issue.

The weak performance of public institutions is highlighted in many reports (European Commission, 2010, p. 9). However, the main challenge that public reform administration faces is the political culture, which is reported by the scholarship beneficiaries themselves in a Young Cell Scheme expert study, in the form of nepotism, politicisation and lack of meritocracy (YCS expert study, 2015). Interestingly, after recent Kosovo political party leader telephone leaks<sup>57</sup>, the president of the parliament, the Prime Minister and the UK Ambassador in Kosovo recognised the extreme politicisation of the public administration and the failure of Kosovo government to ensure fair recruitment procedures. When signing an agreement between Kosovo and the UK government to fund an independent UK company to manage the recruitment process of senior positions in the institutions of Kosovo, the UK Ambassador stated:

*Fair and merit-based employment in Kosovo is a problem. Nepotism and family and party-based employment are not new. Recently we heard phone conversations of senior state officials and their influence in hiring their relatives. As I said, this is not new or something that we did not already know. Employment to honour someone or to repay a debt is wrong. A country does not function this way. Nepotism is a cancer that kills a country. This happens for two reasons: Because the quality of the candidate is not taken into consideration, and because it creates debt that must be repaid, to the detriment of society.*

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<sup>57</sup> The telephone leaks were made public during August 2016 through an online portal insajderi.com which published conversations of the parliamentary leader of the ruling party PDK which revealed cronyism and nepotistic employment in all levels of institutions including higher education institutions' boards and management, courts and independent agencies.

*If the practice of employing unsuitable candidates continues, it will destroy Kosovo - there is no doubt about it!*

*At the moment, no one believes that employment is based on merit and qualifications. Therefore, we must break this practice and restore citizens' confidence in the institutions of Kosovo.*

(The UK Ambassador in Kosovo, 15 August 2016)

These events resonate with participants' experience in the public sector, and further signal problems of integration considering the increase in number of scholarship beneficiaries over the years. In the case of the participants in this study who are employed in the public sector, employment alone does not support changes in the administration if the scholarship beneficiary cannot apply anything from the field of specialisation or faces ethical and role conflicts. In contemplating professional roles, negotiation is manifested by participants as a state of being in between and with ups and downs. Regression seems to be temporal until further opportunity for action is possible. Integration requires agency in transforming professional trajectories through negotiating roles in the workplace, making decisions to leave jobs, changing careers and taking risks.

### **Transforming Realities**

Integrating general and discipline specific knowledge, theories, skills, attitudes and beliefs through academic, work related or social actions and endeavours in Kosovan society results in participants becoming more authentic and agentic. Becoming authentic is "a person who acts in accordance with desires, motives, ideals or beliefs that are not only hers (as opposed to someone else's), but that also express who she really is" (Varga and Guignon, 2016). In becoming authentic professionals, participants exercise pronounced agency. Gaining status, contextualising and contemplating professional trajectories represents identity construction involving conflicts and congruency in realising projected identities.

Projected identity is related to the 'ideal' participants wish to maintain by contributing to the development of Kosovo. Becoming an authentic professional involves questioning, positioning and acting authentically and autonomously in personal and professional situations. Findings suggest two main outcomes: Becoming Authentic and Becoming a Change Agent.

***Becoming Authentic***

Becoming authentic is accompanied by active negotiation, and yet goes beyond conflict management and role negotiation, towards influencing change. Authenticity is expressed in participants' practice through consistent implementation of change agendas within institutions or in the public sphere and through opinion making and network activation. Participants report becoming authentic as acting based on their beliefs, regardless of the barriers they face. By becoming authentic, they expose themselves at work or in public through actions based on new perspectives. By engaging in public discourse, they take positions on important issues and influence public opinion or the discipline. It is apparent that their employment in the NGO sector and Universities as well as their expert status provides opportunities to engage in public discourse through different media. For example, Ilir, becoming aware of factors that constrain freedom of expression and public discourse, opposes such conditions by engaging in the public discourse with his letters from 'Limbo'.

*“Limbo is a place, a dream situation, where you are stuck and cannot go out. Kosovo for me is such a place, where you are stuck and cannot go out, so there is a need for voices that would tell things as they are. ....So this is related to what I have gained from the UK, to generate an idea and have the courage to express it. There, this was important. If you have an original idea, you need to have the courage to say it first. When I started with publications, there were few articles where you could say things freely against a phenomenon. I remember I was one of the first persons to write against X issue. The X Issue had public support. In my family I received comments like: Are you insane,*

*X is a patriotic project. For me it was not correct, based on the knowledge and analysis I made. Being able to publish X was a golden opportunity for me, to express my opinions whenever I want on different topics. So it gave me the opportunity to comment on issues critically, different from the standard reporting clichés.*

(Interview with Ilir, 2012)

Ilir clearly highlights the struggle for free speech, which is still a contentious issue in Kosovo (Freedom House, 2016). His authenticity is expressed in his aims to be original as well as grounded. His analysis on X issue is not driven by popular opinion but by his research. He explains the perceived need to be cautious and courageous. His authentic and autonomous actions represent transformative practice because he becomes a voice from the limbo to pursue his ideals.

Ilir expresses becoming authentic as transcending popular opinion and acting for change. However, as Ilir later explains, the external circumstances for engaging in discourse are less favourable, suggesting that changes of identity are negotiated with peers and with the larger community. Nevertheless, according to Ilir, scholarship beneficiaries have contributed to social change because of the integration of transformed competence and worldviews.

*I: But it all depends on the character. Someone becomes part of the system, but in general, these people who have studied abroad are voices of change in Kosovo. If you now for a moment think of these people who raise their voices and contribute to change, they all have studied abroad. Many things in Kosovo would not happen if it was not for these scholarships. We would be far behind professionally, in the way we think and say things. We are unfortunate because we had a break in between generations. This break has brought us*

*to the position that we don't have many middle-aged people to take positions and push things forward. We are very young. Unfortunately, I am labelled an expert and I am not even 30 years old. How can you be an expert with thirty years? So we are missing people aged 50 with similar worldviews and we are not taken seriously.*

**B:** *How can you survive in this situation?*

**I:** *So far so good, but it is not easy. Very often, you get disappointed with the results of your work, and you are satisfied only when you are with people like yourself. But generally, you ask yourself: "Why are you disturbing the waters? Go with the flow like some do." It is not easy because you are not recognised. It is very difficult to recognise the work you do differently. They want you to be like everyone else. You are expected to be not above or against, but part of the system.*

(Interview with Ilir, 2012)

According to Ilir, scholarship beneficiaries, as a community, are compensating for the loss of a generation that were constrained educationally and professionally because of the long-term conflict in Kosovo. However, becoming authentic is not easy when struggling with power issues, suggesting that it requires risk-taking, such as criticising government policies and injustices. Ilir refers to possibilities to be part of the system or not, inferring that becoming authentic may have consequences such as not being able to get executive positions. He also warns of possibilities for regression pushed by possibilities to get executive positions.

From participants' narratives, conflict and temporary regression is part of becoming authentic. Although they gain positions, good salaries and opportunities, they seek self-realisation opportunities. Authenticity in Ilir's narrative is expressed as being able to express one's own beliefs and not be part of the system as in 'average everydayness' (Heidegger, 1962 in Varga

and Guignon, 2016). In Ilir's narrative we can notice expressions of authenticity, negotiation of expectations, contemplation of choices and purpose. This is in line with what Mezirow claims, that making a decision is action, and evaluating risks and obstacles and acting based on them is action. However, becoming authentic requires agency and risk-taking. Engaging in public discourse is a kind of risk as is positioning for political, economic or social issues. In this case, Ilir's actions are more than managing his transformative study abroad outcomes but transforming realities through his influence in public discourse.

***Becoming a Change Agent***

Acting on transformed beliefs and becoming a change agent depends on the level of influence one has on environment. That is, besides willingness, other factors, such as ability and support are important in facilitating change. This can be illustrated with Linda's engagement in a change strategy. Linda, who had experience and status at her work, is well received by her colleagues and students. She is also successful at bringing about changes on several levels, depending on the role.

*So the change of my personal beliefs about music education has also influenced my work on the curriculum committee in the Ministry of Education. I brought new ideas and tried to convince others to accept unconventional ways of thinking and writing about music books for children. I have been able to include CDs with different types of music in the curriculum and they are now part of Music School books. In addition to this I have come to understand the importance of teaching methodology. I now support the development of teaching methodology in music and have been better able to contribute to the curriculum preparation than previously. So I think this has enabled me to better contribute directly to the music curriculum, music books but also to policies about teacher preparation in general.*

*The majority see this positively, especially the students. The most frequent positive feedback from students is about our relationship. They tell me that they like the feeling of being equal or free with a professor and that this helps them to better express what they think and feel. They often refer to how different I am from some other teachers. I always tell them that everyone has a certain teaching style, and that the reason I talk about these things openly is that I have experienced something different and that I want to share that with them.*

*The first things I addressed in my teaching practice were based on the negative experience I had. I talked to students about how they write. I introduced a research methods module in the master's programme. I completely changed the approach in the music education module that was taught previously by my mentor. So I avoided the reproduction method and engaged students in sharing experience, discussing in groups and reflecting on their teaching practice. I even included teaching practice as part of the curriculum. I even changed dissertation procedures for master degree.*

(Interview with Linda, 2012)

Linda clearly changes her behaviour and influences others. Her influence is on students, curriculum at the departmental and national level, and the wider music education system, through books, research and teaching practice reform. In implementing her change agenda, she mentions persuading skills and the ability to translate her ideas in different innovations, be it regulations, media, or other contributions. Therefore, becoming a change agent involves commitment and leadership.

Becoming a change agent is exercising a role; it means taking responsibility and employing different strategies. Linda experiences acceptance and obstacles. At the faculty level, her questioning and initiative is accepted in changing the programme structure and design. In teaching,

she feels free to introduce new teaching methods, practice and innovation. However, at the management level, she found obstacles and was forced to push initiatives on her own. For example, when trying to improve management practices she took on extra work and more students and responsibilities, for the same salary. She has accepted this role but has changed her intentions, claiming that “the degree will no longer be used to get a more stable job and fulfil her role as mother, as expected from her family”, but rather to pursue active engagement in politics and to change policies.

*Therefore, I belong to the processes in a professional way, but I am not part of the group [political party, government]. And this is a problem, everyone likes my ideas, but these structures [political structures] do not have direct interest in these ideas. ...So either I have to do it all alone, or spend so much time to convince them. So in my case, they listen to me and I have to do extra work. So life becomes a battle, you need to have a strategy when to advance, when to retreat, when to hide and how to create supporters and followers.*

(Interview with Linda, 2012)

In becoming an authentic professional, commitment is crucial. Linda is aware that the context for the implementation of new perspectives is difficult. Her negotiation abilities become strategic and move from becoming more authentic to becoming a leader.

The examples clearly show the effect of the scholarship schemes in becoming authentic and seeking change. However, change is not easy, as participants describe it as a struggle and a battle with a system. Although there are obstacles, participants make decisions and undertake actions towards achieving their ideals. They achieve different results, but they nonetheless engage in further critical reflection while using different

validation strategies to manage their transformation and influencing strategies in order to transform realities.

### **Conclusion**

This research explored the re-integration phase of the transformative learning theory, to investigate the integration dynamics of the individual and the surrounding environment. The findings suggest that the transformative dimensions of the study abroad experience lie in the possibility of learners to cross different boundaries in meaning making as learners and as professionals. The research explored concrete outcomes, actions, behaviours and decisions undertaken by participants in view of their association with transformative learning outcomes. As such, it investigated how one person becomes in interaction across contexts through actions based on new ways of knowing and being and the capacity to implement knowledge, skills and values in practice (Akkerman and Bakker, 2011; Mezirow, 1991; Freire, 1970). In light of transformative learning theory, the outcomes are better understood as a process of becoming across contexts. As such, transformative learning study abroad outcomes can be explained in terms of boundary crossing, referring to integrating identities across contexts, where boundaries are found and crossed in education settings, within work, between education and work, between UK and Kosovo contexts and between discourses. Integration means achieving continuity across spaces, taking actions based on new ways of knowing and being and having the capacity to implement knowledge, skills and values in practice (Akkerman and Bakker, 2011, Mezirow, 1991, Freire, 1970). In other words, integration is the way one person becomes through interaction across contexts.

The findings suggest that integration involves four main processes: 1) Gaining Status, 2) Contextualising Identities, 3) Contemplating Professional Trajectories and 4) Transforming Realities. The identity gain with jobs, positions, and status is reported in the study abroad literature as development of human capital outcomes (Flack, 1976; Fry, 1984;

Selvaratnam,1993; Solimano, 2002). This is confirmed by this study as participants as scholarship beneficiaries gain professional status through employment and income generation above Kosovo's average salary. Moreover, participants change jobs or are promoted to executive positions, while some of them take up public office and some of them hold more than one job. Others become opinion makers and influencers. Transformative learning is realised in the ways they integrate their experience. Rather than a competence transfer, participants become more competent through engaging in problem solving, innovation and changing their practice. They create new practices and bridges between contexts by introducing language, concepts, models and tools. In other words, the study abroad experience gives them opportunities and tools to reframe their engagement strategies.

When enacting different strategies, participants report outcomes such as becoming more open and self-aware and becoming more critically aware. Higher status, improved competences and reframed epistemology construct different personal and social outlooks through contextualisation. Participants as young professionals in Kosovo gain a different perspective through which they see themselves, their workplace and Kosovo society. They apply different knowledge, methods and standards during contextualisation. The contextualisation process illuminates barriers that they need to negotiate in Kosovo.

When learners contemplate professional trajectories, they *negotiate and modify professional roles* based on the new perspectives. The main factors influencing the decision making at this stage are cooperation, support, commitment, negotiation abilities and role management. Decisions include modifying or strengthening intentions, implementing conflict management strategies and opposition. As a result, the ability of learners to practice new ways of knowing and being can be associated with negative and positive outcomes, depending on how successful the integration is. When there are obstacles that the individual cannot control, integration is about managing transformation. When participants find networks and support in the workplace, their integration is about transforming realities.

The individual differences consist of their varying ability to influence change. As participants only temporarily regress and actively pursue their goals, they change strategies to manage transformation and the environment.

These findings contradict Mezirow's ideal conditions in which learners can participate in critical discourse and take actions:

“Free full adult participation in critical discourse and resulting action clearly requires freedom, democratic participation, equality, reciprocity, prior education through which one has learned to assess evidence effectively, make and understand relevant arguments, develop critical judgment and engage in critical reflection. Such participation also implies a reasonable minimal level of safety, mental and physical health, shelter, and employment opportunity, as well as acceptance of others with different perspectives and social cooperation.”

*(Mezirow, 1991.p.199)*

This thesis argues that these conditions are rarely entirely present, and are not reported in the participant experiences of their re-integration in Kosovo. Therefore, although these ideal conditions are absent, participants, in varying degrees, take risks and exercise leadership to transform their realities. The study abroad experience has developed their capacities for critical reflection, judgement and argumentation and this has facilitated the negotiation process as well as integration. In Mezirow's terms, that is the meaning of perspective transformation:

“Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectations to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and finally making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings.”

*(Mezirow, 1991, p.167)*

In other words, the identity change participants experience during their study abroad experience in the UK will influence all other experiences, but will still be open to change. This implies that integration is not only the implementation of what students have become during the study abroad

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experience, but a process of ‘becoming in interaction across two contexts’. Therefore, both a conducive environment and individual agency contribute to identity integration and to transforming realities.

## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore **identity transformation and integration** of 16 Kosovo scholarship beneficiaries who studied on post-graduate programmes in the UK. The study attempted to answer two main research questions:

1. In what way did Kosovo postgraduate scholarship beneficiaries experience study abroad as potentially transformative learning experience through participation in UK universities?
2. How do participants integrate their identity transformation in their professional practice in Kosovo?

This research was motivated by an understanding that education provides possibilities for individual and societal transformations. The research intended to interrogate the assumptions of the study abroad scholarship providers that, after a study abroad experience, scholarship beneficiaries will change their capacities and will contribute to institutional and societal changes in Kosovo (Young Cell Scheme, 2015, Staffordshire University and OSI, Scholarship Scheme, KESP 2016). The development strategy pursued by Kosovo Governments and Scholarship Agencies, motivated by high unemployment rates and unsatisfactory institutional performance (Young Cell Scheme, 2015) conceived investment in human capital through study abroad scholarship schemes as a brain gain policy to overcome development gaps both in economic terms and social terms. While the human capital approach addresses the productivity of the work force and income generation ability through social and private returns (Blundell et al, 1999), it does not address the role of education in shaping learner identity and the social and cultural dimensions shaping institutional, labour market and general societal contours (Robeyns, 2006).

Drawing from the analysis of Chapter 2: Kosovo Educational Landscape, education was interpreted as creating tensions between different stakeholders. It was suggested that historically, education in Kosovo, on one

hand, offered possibilities to raise national consciousness, to recapture national identity and to enable societal transitions such as industrialisation and modernisation; On the other hand, education opportunities created development constraints through ethnic segregation, identity construction and limiting education experiences in the specific historical, political and social context in Kosovo. Education was interpreted as reflecting and shaping Kosovan society, including the fabric of human capital and learner identity.

This research adopted a holistic approach involving the transformative learning theory and identity as its conceptual framework to interrogate the role of learning in identity shaping as a process of becoming (Mezirow, 1991; Illeris, 2007, Jenkins, 2008; Wenger, 1999; Kolb and Kolb, 2016). This approach intended to address the contradictions between the individual and social approaches in the transformative learning theory through conceptualisation of identity as “identification process” (Jenkins, 2008). Identification as an analytical framework provides an integrative approach to explore participants’ experiences of study abroad in terms of identity shaping, transformation and integration across contexts, as a process where the individual and the social are entangled. In this way the interrogation of participants’ prior learning experiences in Kosovo, their consequent study abroad experiences in the UK and their integration in the Kosovo workplace provided a ‘big picture’ of participants’ identity changes involving their past, present and contemplated future learning and professional trajectories. The study focused on learner identity as a unit of analysis focusing on participants’ narratives as learners within educational institutions and the workplace. Through exploring differences across Kosovo and UK contexts, the research intended to explore further understanding of cultural and contextual dimensions in transformative learning.

The research used an *active interview method* (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) in line with the narrative inquiry approach which posits that through interaction between participants and the researcher, the

understanding of the ‘what and how’ of the experience is explored. The active interview was guided by the following additional research questions and the interview guide<sup>58</sup>, as frameworks to be explored within the active interview dynamics.

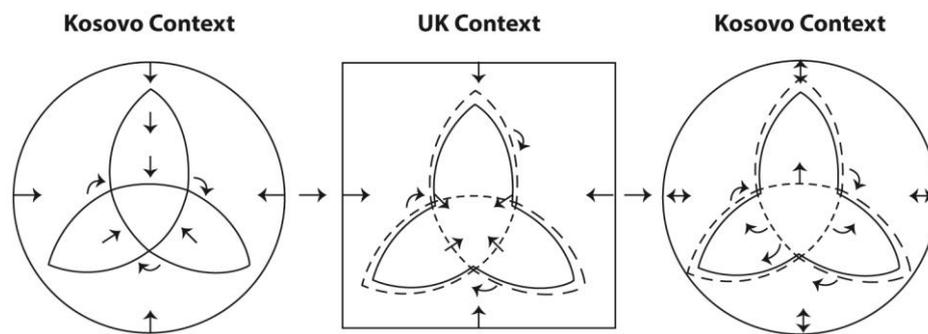
- What is the profile of participants?
- How do participants describe their educational experience and their learning development in Kosovo?
- Do participants share meaning perspectives as a result of their social, economic, cultural and educational backgrounds?
- Why did participants choose to study in the UK?
- How do participants describe their educational experience and self-development in the UK?
- How do participants make meaning out of their study abroad experience?
- How do participants make sense of who they and others are at an ‘individual level, interactional level and institutional level’, in the UK and in Kosovo after returning (Jenkins, 2008, p. 39)?
- To what extent, if any, have participants experienced change and what is the outcome of the experience in the UK?
- How do these experiences influence professional practice in Kosovo after their return?

Assuming that there are differences between Kosovo and the UK, the research conceptualised the differences in contexts through the concept of *communities of practice* (Wenger, 1999) which shape participants’ “*frame of reference*” (Mezirow, 1991) referring to “boundary structures that influence perception, remembering, meaning making and action” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 5). Broadly, the process of *Becoming Learners across Contexts* is interpreted through three main categories: 1) *Shaping Learner Identities*; 2) *Transforming Learning Identities at the Boundaries*; and 3) *Integrating Identity Transformations across contexts*. Transformations resulting from

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<sup>58</sup> Interview Guide in Appendix 3

study abroad experience occur through participants' experiences with *boundaries* between Kosovo and UK contexts, referring to "socio cultural difference leading to disorientation and discontinuity in action and interaction" (Akkerman and Bakker, 2011; Wenger, 1999). The Boundary Experience involves disharmony, disorientation and discontinuity when acting and interacting within the UK communities of practice and 'boundary crossing' when acting and interacting to overcome boundaries and integrate their experience in their professional practice in Kosovo. Although there are individual differences that make up the biography of participants, as well as institutional differences where participants experience is situated, identity construction may be explained along a spectrum of learning processes and outcomes that participants share as 'becoming learners across contexts'. The main themes across three categories are identity entanglement, conflict, resilience, resistance, negotiation, projection and the internal and external interaction within the institutions and the broader social environment. The process is visualised in figure 24 representing learner identity shaping, transformation and integration across contexts.



**Figure 25 Learner Identity Shaping, Transformation and Integration across Contexts**

### **Contribution to Knowledge and Implications**

The first contribution of this study is the framing of learning identity experience through the analysis of education in Kosovo and through narratives of individual experiences. The Kosovo education landscape marking four transition points in the role of education for Kosovan society provides a framework to analyse collective identity shaping and its impact

on educational development and human capital. Although there are studies that engaged with ethnic identity constructions through education (Kostovicova, 2005) and construction of national identities, these studies are theoretical and do not draw upon individual learning experiences of Kosovo participants as a basis for their evidence. This study contributes to literature that politicises ethnicity and its broader context in shaping learning experiences and learner identities in conflict-affected societies. On a more practical level, the findings facilitate the analysis of identity construction efforts and the resistance tactics applied by learners, schools and communities to maintain ethnic identity. In addition, these findings may inform policy makers, curriculum developers, teachers and students about identity shaping dynamics as well as contribute to the ongoing debate on Albanian and the new Kosovan identity.

Second, the findings contribute to the understanding of the impact of long-term conflicts, societal transitions and crises on learner identity. Currently, in many countries in the world, because of conflict and the refugee crisis, children, youth and adults are placed in positions that risk their existential security. Although education programmes are not given priority due to shelter and healthcare emergencies, in terms of investment, they may help refugees maintain their self-identity and learner identity in their struggles to survive. Even in post-conflict aid, support for education and especially for improving resources and pedagogies can contribute to enabling learner potential and facilitating societal transitions, provided that they do not engage in artificial identity construction and superficial practice transfer. Therefore, in cases of international aid, besides educational infrastructure, support to education should foster staff development and student and staff international exposure.

Third, the research contributes to research exploring the differences between contexts in ordinary higher education contexts in Kosovo and the UK in order to explain the influence of context in identity transformations. First, the contextual approach highlighted differences between teacher centred and student centred learning methods and their roles in knowledge transmission, creation and questioning and in shaping critical reflective

skills and authenticity associated with transformative learning. It is suggested that transformative learning requires a learner centred environment which combines learning activities that challenge learners, provide different perspectives, support learner expression and nurture student-teacher relationships. This concurs with learning theorists Kolb, Illeris, Osguthorpe and Wenger that identity transformations occur through a type of learning that in addition to acquiring knowledge and skills, provides an experience in which learners grow and acquire an identity (Osguthorpe, 2006), change their identity (Osguthorpe, 2006, Illeris, 2011; Illeris, 2013; Wenger, 1999) and cross boundaries through expanding their meaning framework through participating in the community. Findings from this study suggest that changing learning contexts creates possibilities for engaging with similarities and differences between contexts and identity transformations.

The research contributes by providing another perspective to conceptualise and analyse transformative learning resulting from study abroad experience. First, it uses the concept of boundaries and boundary crossing (Akkerman and Bakker, 2011) and communities of practice (Wenger, 1999) to explicate identity transformations. Unlike the ten stages suggested by Mezirow(1991) representing an individual and intentional process of building up of competence and confidence, the transformative learning process during study abroad is conceptualised as a reciprocal and ongoing process, involving little planning and control by learners during the study abroad experience. Learners interact with the environment under conditions of communication, such as language of instruction and communication style. Communication is contextual involving cultural and disciplinary dimensions of content and discourse culture in interactions between the learner and situations implicated in pedagogies, student-teacher relationships and relationships with peers and significant others. For learning to be transformative, it needs to engage all three dimensions: ways of knowing, being and interacting. By delineating these dimensions, the findings contribute to the reports of transformative learning experience as an ongoing process of reshaping and reframing.

This research contributes to the discussion of individual and social transformative learning outcomes resulting from study abroad. Through combining the measurable outcomes, such as position, salary, job changes and reported outcomes of competence and development, personal and institutional changes, the findings highlight positive *and* negative outcomes. By providing evidence of temporary regression and alienation, these findings differ from the positive reports found in the literature. In addition, the study finds that although the majority of participants accomplish some of the goals of the scholarship schemes and some of them fulfil the conditions of becoming leaders, opinion makers and change agents, participants still face significant difficulties during integration.

While participants have developed the capacity for self-differentiation and expression and the ability to more critically evaluate their own and others' beliefs and behaviours, their difficulties in integration are expressed as 'limbo', 'mosaic', 'battle' and 'highway', representing ongoing struggles, resilience and strategies in the integration dynamics. The integration struggles bring insight to the dynamics of continuity and change in Kosovan Society and show how learners engage with these dynamics. Changes in the learning culture at the societal level happen slowly and over longer periods compared to changes at the individual level. This study has provided evidence of the potential for individuals to create significant change in their zones of influence and the potential to increase this intensity if similar changes are pursued by a group. Similarly, the study found that although in some cases external forces limited or alienated individuals, these are not deterministic, as participants seek out new opportunities in which to integrate their identities.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is a unique study exploring the integration of study abroad experience with participants from Kosovo from a learning identity change lens. Reports to date cover employment, satisfaction and engagement level in public administration without analysing the dynamics of identity changes or re-integration of

scholarship beneficiaries. Findings from this study could inform policy and practice on problems students face when studying abroad and when reintegrating in Kosovo. For students who embark on study abroad programmes, the findings can be used to address academic barriers and to promote the importance of cross-cultural learning for student development. These findings may offer insights to educational stakeholders and scholarship providers concerning the problems they may need to address in preparatory programmes. As Kosovo has recently accessed several European schemes for mobility, the findings can inform schools and universities, with the intention of improving educational practices.

For institutions receiving international students, the findings suggest the need for consideration of the cultural background, academic skill mismatch and language on student epistemology and learner identity. While international student recruitment and student exchange programmes have become an important university income, understanding student struggles to participate in different cultures may help universities to design student support mechanisms. Although students' disharmony triggers critical reflection and epistemic doubting leading to significant learning, the feelings of shame and crisis could be lessened if appropriate preparatory programmes are offered to assist transition without significantly affecting student performance or wellbeing. For staff teaching and supervising international students, it is important to recognise the impact they have on the students' coping and development processes. The recognition that students may face crises and feel inferior may help supervisors provide assistance to access appropriate resources, such as writing workshops, writing seminars and counselling. Recognising the process of epistemological shift in students' experience may also help their teaching and supervision practice.

Finally, this study confirms the benefits and risks of study abroad as a development strategy at the individual level and at the institutional level. It is evident that scholarship beneficiaries all secured better career opportunities and implemented their experience in the workplace. Their

initiatives include changing education programmes, management practices, work practices and introducing innovations. However, findings also suggest some risks involved in this strategy.

First, while rigorous selection procedures are used to award scholarships, the opportunity is availed of from the highly skilled, thus concentrating the investment strategy on highly skilled students. Therefore, while study abroad is developmental for those few selected, it cannot compensate for investment in the quality of education in Kosovo, especially taking into consideration the constraining dimensions identified by participants. The findings suggest that interventions at the programme level in Kosovo have had an impact on students' learning experience. Therefore, within the changing Kosovo society, a combination of education interventions and staff development programmes for teachers at different levels may more effectively impact transformative learning possibilities.

The second risk found in this study is the challenging workplace environment that creates tension in participants' integration experience and may cause brain drain or alienation. The risk of oversupply may result in the inability for employment or further disadvantaging those who could not avail of scholarship opportunities. Institutions receiving scholarship beneficiaries should pay particular attention to matching incumbent specialisation with job role, to meritocratic employment and to addressing motivation, recognition and self-realisation factors in order to avoid brain drain. Constraints in freedom of expression may restrain professional criticism, which results in risks such as silencing or alienation. Nevertheless, the study suggests that the positive effects of transformation, although hindered by political and social developments in Kosovo, are developmental because of the potential for individual or group agency in implementing change.

Finally, as research and academic opportunities are still scarce and underdeveloped, scholarship beneficiaries' interest and further development could be facilitated by brain circulation initiatives that integrate them across contexts. This is particularly important for Kosovo government, because while scholarship beneficiaries can access other education and employment

opportunities in Kosovo or abroad, the investment strategy aimed at changing institutions should not focus only on producing English and technology savvy specialists, who cannot practice their professions or realise their identities. Thus, scholarship agencies could design brain circulation programmes that activate engagement of scholarship beneficiaries in meaningful ways, such as publishing their research during study abroad, initiating further research initiatives or supporting networking events.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study are related to the sample of participants interviewed and the methodology. First, the sample did not include any students from other minorities living in Kosovo, thus concentrating on Kosovo Albanians and their particular learning experience. Second, the sample includes those participants who agreed to participate when responding to the Brain Circulation Survey, thus including those that were interested in the research topic. In addition, the participants' experience of education in Kosovo covers period from 1978 to 2009 thus does not investigate the dynamics of Kosovan identity construction promoted after Kosovo declared independence in 2008. Moreover, although the sample represents an even gender ratio and appropriate distribution in scholarship schemes, a larger number of participants would enrich data interpretation, even though this could not be used for generalisations. Therefore, this study is limited in its understanding of the process of transformation involving 16 participants and although it cannot be used to generalise for other scholarship beneficiaries, it offers insight into processes these participants share.

In terms of methodology, it is emphasised that the study did not use a validated instrument to measure self-concept, self-efficacy or other identity dimensions. The LAS questionnaire was mainly used to select participants, based on reported phases of transformation. While the LAS survey also helped to identify learning activities that activated change, other data from the Brain Circulation Survey served to determine participant

classification attributes and contributed to better data analysis and interpretation. Therefore, the study uses a primarily interpretative approach where other collected data are used to enrich the analysis.

Further, the research covers three periods (pre-departure, study in the UK, and re-integration) based on retrospective accounts. Limitations regarding gathering reports of experience after study abroad were considered and weighed against the approach of gathering reports during the study abroad experience, as the latter would not include the integration phase of the transformative learning experience. Similarly, issues regarding self-presentation are understood as part of the identification process. Therefore, although the study recognises the possibility of different interpretations at different points in time, it intended to capture the whole story as narrated by participants covering experiences prior, during and after studying abroad.

### **Further Research and Publication Possibilities**

Further research suggestions are divided into two areas: 1. Extension of studies with scholarship beneficiaries from other schemes and 2. Conducting studies in Kosovo schools to understand the construction of Kosovo identity promoted after Kosovo declared independence.

As many other scholarships are available, further research could be carried out with beneficiaries from other scholarship schemes covering Western countries and Eastern countries. Further studies could be carried out to explore scholarship beneficiaries involved in teaching institutions, as this professional area seemed to allow easier integration of participants through expressed authenticity and autonomy. Other studies could concentrate on beneficiaries who became politicians, religious leaders and decision makers, in order to analyse their integration through their decisions and actions. For example, other research could include scholarship beneficiaries in Eastern countries to analyse their influence on the changes in religious practices in Kosovo. If funding is available, the research could include a larger number of participants.

Further research with different participants could use a longitudinal approach to include student interviews, pre-departure, during study abroad and after the return. In addition, research design could include interviews with scholarship management officials, host institution coordinators, teachers and supervisors from institutions receiving Kosovan students. Their insight into the experience with Kosovan students, including support offered and challenges, could assist the improvement of future scholarship schemes, as well as contribute to further understanding of academic problems Kosovo students face when studying abroad. Finally, my interest is to apply for a research grant to explore the study abroad experiences of beneficiaries from the American Transformative Leadership Scholarship Scheme, which would allow me to draw on the experience I had with the PhD dissertation and cooperate with other researchers. As this is an ongoing scheme, there may be possibilities to design a longitudinal methodology.

In terms of publication, the Chapter on Kosovo Education could be published as a paper in a journal focusing on the impact of historical and political circumstances on the development of education and collective identity. The periods adopted in this thesis have already been used and referenced in a forthcoming book chapter that explores the development of music education in Kosovo, “Kosovo: A struggle for freedom and national identity (Luzha, 2016 in Cox and Stevens, 2016). The literature review on study abroad and a synthesised version of the thesis could be published as separate papers in the *Journal of Transformative Learning* and/or presented at transformative learning conferences.

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## APPENDIXES

### Appendix 1 Interview Schedule

Nr	Scholarship Schemes	Age	Gender	Participants responded yes to participate in research	Delivery Status	Response Status	LAS	Interview Date	Audio Recording
1	Chevening	33	M	Y	Sent	N/A	Y		
2	Young Cell	34	M	Y	Sent	Done	Y	7/4/12	Y
3	Young Cell	24	F	Y	Sent	Done	Y	7/10/12	Y
4	OSI/ Staffordshire University	35	F	Y	Sent	N/A	Y		
5	OSI/Staffordshire University	32	F	Y	Sent	N/A	Y		
6	OSI/Staffordshire University	29	F	Y	Sent	N/A	Y		
7	Young Cell	28	F	Y	Sent	Done	Y	7/28/12	Y
8	Chevening	32	M	Y	Sent	Done	Y	7/24/12	Y
9	Chevening	35	F	Y	Sent	Done	Y	7/3/12	Y
10	Chevening	38	F	Y	Sent	Done	Y	7/6/12	Y
11	OSI/Staffordshire University	36	M	Y	Sent	Done	Y	7/19/12	Y
12	OSI/Staffordshire University	32	M	Y	Sent	Done	Y	3/30/12	Y
13	OSI/Staffordshire University	32	F	Y	Sent	N/A	Y		
14	Chevening	36	M	Y	Sent	N/A	Y		
15	OSI/Staffordshire University	28	M	Y	Sent	Done	Y	5/2/12	Y
16	OSI/Staffordshire University	33	M	Y	Sent	Done	Y	7/25/12	Y
17	OSI/Staffordshire University	24	F	Y	Sent	Done	Y	7/19/12	Y
18	Young Cell	31	M	Y	Sent	N/A	Y		
19	Young Cell	29	M	Y	Sent	Done	Y	7/17/12	Y
20	Young Cell	24	M	Y	Sent	N/A	Y		
21	Young Cell	23	F	Y	Sent	Done	Y	3/9/12	Y
22	OSI/Staffordshire University	28	M	Y	Sent	Done	Y	5/3/12	Y
23	Other	41	F	Y	Sent	Done	Y	2/15/12; 12/19/13	Y
24	Young Cell Scheme	30	F	Y	Sent	Done	Y	7/18/12	Y

## **Appendix 2: Informed Consent**

### **INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

**PROJECT TITLE:** Integrating study abroad transformational learning in Kosovo workplace

**RESEARCHER:** Bardha Qirezi, PhD Student at the National University of Ireland in Galway (NUIG)

**RESEARCH SUPERVISORS:** Dr. Anne Walsh

**CONTACTS:** Personal: Ulpiana C15 h2 nr 1 10000 Prishtina. Tel: 044 14 88 88rmail: [bardha.qirezi@gmail.com](mailto:bardha.qirezi@gmail.com)  
University Affiliation:  
National University of Ireland in Galway (NUIG)  
<http://www.nuigalway.ie/>

You are being asked to volunteer for a research study “Integrating study abroad transformational learning in Kosovo workplace”. This is a study in the framework of PhD dissertation and you were selected as a possible participant because:

- A) You indicated that you are willing to participate in this study through a previous survey conducted by the Riinvest Institute titled “Brain Gain and the role of the Diaspora”.
- B) You indicated that you are willing to participate after being contacted by the researcher through email or phone.

Please take a minute to read this form and ask any questions before agreeing to take part in this interview.

#### **Purpose of the Research Study**

The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding the extent to which study abroad experience in the UK can promote transformational learning and the extent to which students are integrating their new ideas, concepts and learning in the Kosovo workplace after their return.

#### **Procedures**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

If you have not already responded to the Survey, you will be asked to do so before the interview;

If you have already responded the survey, you will be asked to review responses in the survey and confirm their use for this study.

You will be asked open-ended questions concerning your experiences as a scholarship student in UK in an interview that should take about one hour.

You will propose or agree the use of the pseudonym to be used in the report.

**During the interview**

The interview will be carried out in a conversational style – I am interested in hearing your experiences of study abroad and your subsequent experiences when you came back to Kosovo.

If at any time you feel uncomfortable during the interview or by the questions asked, please let me know.

You may choose not to answer a question or stop the interview process at any time.

You may ask me questions

**After the interview**

You will have the opportunity to get the interview audio file if you want:

**Compensation**

The nature of your participation is voluntary; no reimbursement will be paid for participating in this research.

**Confidentiality**

The interview will be protected by ethics code of NUI Galway. No identifying data will be made available. Access to the interviews will be provided only to the researcher’s supervisor and to the research committee if requested. Participants’ names will not be linked with their responses unless the participant specifically agrees to be identified.

Audio Taping Of Interview

To assist with accurate recording of participant responses, interviews may be recorded on an audio recording device. Participants have the right to refuse to allow such recording.

Please select one of the following options.

I consent to the use of audio recording.

I do not consent to the use of audio recording.

**STATEMENT OF CONSENT**

I have read the above information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions. On asking questions, I have received satisfactory answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

### **Appendix 3. Interview Guide**

**Interviewee:**

**Pseudonym:**

**Current Employer:**

**Current Job:**

**Age**

**Highest level of Education**

#### **Intro**

**(This is not for Reading. This is for my preparation for the interview)**

Now that we have covered the consent form, I'd like to engage ourselves in a conversation that will contribute to the understanding of your educational experience and how that influenced who you are today in general and with focus in the workplace. I believe that important things happen when learners return in their country/ workplace after having been engaged in postgraduate studies abroad (my assumptions). With your help, we can learn more about this (their perspective).

In the first part of the interview, I would like you to focus on your education experience in Kosovo. Then, I'd like you to move from Kosovo to UK and share your education experience in postgraduate studies. Finally, I'd like you to reflect on your return and current experience in Kosovo at concrete workplace/ workplaces and show how you are implementing that experience. Some of the questions may sound familiar because of the survey you took some time ago. (Signalling what to expect)

**Kosovo/ Education Experience**

**Question 1:**

Could you tell me something about yourself as a pupil and a student in Kosovo? (Establishing context and role)

**Probe 1.** As a child, what do you remember as part of your education experience? (Child /student role)

**Probe 2.** Institution rules/practices/ university activities, Facilities, books

**Probe 3.** What were your relations with peers, teachers?

**Probe 4.** Assessment

**Question 2.** What did you think about yourself as a learner?

**Probe 1.** How did you learn?

**Probe 2.** What worked and what did not work for You? Explain?

**Question 2.**

Why did you decide to study abroad? (Pre- departure context)

**Question 3.**

Describe yourself before you left to UK. In other words, who were you?

**UK / Study abroad experience**

**Question 1.**

What were the first things you faced in your first months at the University? (Establishing context).

**Probe 1.** Individual aspects

**Probe 2.** interactional aspects

**Probe 3.** institutional aspects?

**Question 2.**

See reported education experience in the LAS.

**Question 3.**

How was your educational experience in your host university in UK similar/ different from your home university?

**Probe 1.** Relations with peers, teachers?

**Probe 2.** Institution rules/practices/ university activities, Facilities, books?

**Probe 3.** Assessment?

**Question 4.**

Can you recall how did feel about your : (ask what applies)

Learning style, Writing, Researching, Critical thinking

Can you tell me about your first paper you wrote?

Your exams

**Question 5.**

Tell me about any dilemma, challenge, constrains, discomfort, comfort, during your studies as a result of your previous education experience or new experience?

**Question 6.**

How was that similar/different from what you noticed others were experiencing?

**Question 7.**

Tell me about the similar /different perspectives you have gained through your classes, papers, discussion with friends or through any other experience?

**Question 8.**

If different, what activities you undertook to adapt to new environment and be successful?

**Question 9.**

Is there any significant event that influenced how you thought about: School? Learning? Your future choices? Or made you think in particular way?

**Question 10.**

What did you do about it?

**Question 11.**

Why do you think they are / are not important?

**Question 12:**

How important were these for your teachers, peers to be successful

**Question 13.**

In retrospect, what areas of preparation may have enhanced your international experience?

**Question 14.**

Is there any other significant event that influenced change during your study abroad?

- Marriage
- Loss of a job
- Moving
- Divorce/separation
- Change of job
- Addition of a child
- Death of loved one
- Other

Please describe it?

**Kosovo/ Workplace experience**

**Question 1.**

If you could say which were the main personal and professional benefits from your study abroad experience?

**Question 2.**

Can you recall the first three weeks after you returned definitely from UK? Home, family, friends and work?  
(if first/or new job)

**Question 3.**

Describe your first job after returning from abroad?

Probe :What were the requirements and expectations?

Probe: Tell me about your work style, commitment, attitudes and their relationship if any with your study abroad experience?

**Question 4:**

Did you try to implement new knowledge, skills, and values beliefs at your work? How did you do it?

**Question 5:**

Can you tell me about the influence of the language in your performance?

**If old job**

**Question 6:**

Describe your job after you returned from abroad? How similar/different seemed your work compared to previous experience?

**Question 7:**

Have you or others noticed any change in yourself on the way you do things?

**Question 8:**

To what extend does your work style, commitment, attitudes have to do with your study abroad experience?

**Question 9:**

Did you try to implement new knowledge, skills, and values beliefs at your work? How did you do it?

**Question 10.**

How do you see the work you do?

Probe: What is the situation in your profession in Kosovo?

Probe: How does this situation fit with new believes, values and practices

Probe: Tell me about any dilemma, challenge, constrains, discomfort, comfort, negotiation in your workplace as a result the new beliefs, values and practices gained abroad in

Probe: In relation to how you saw, your selves and others saw you.

Probe: In relation to your expectations and your employer's expectations?

Probe: Why do you think is important to care for how others do /see their work?

**Question 11.**

Did you see others experiencing similar dilemmas?

**Question 12.**

What did you do to fit in the ways of knowing and behaving within your work environment, culture, structure? (Relationships, Recognition, Resistance, Imposition, Internalisation)

**Question 13.**

What would you change in your job, workplace, yourself? Why?

**Question 14:**

**Can you describe yourself now? In other words, how what you are / what you have become is influencing your work?**

Probe: What is it about your profession/ work that is most interesting/important?

Probe: How different is this view from others in your workplace/profession

## Appendix 4 Search Syntax and Results

Databases	Search syntax	Number of Results	Scan Selection for further review	Selected from criteria based review
Sage	" transform* learning"or student identity in all fields and graduate or international in all fields and return or reintegration in all fields and effect or impact in all fields, from Jan 2000 through Oct 2011 in SAGE journals available to me	206	33	33
Scopus	" transform* learning"	242	30	7
Science Direct	("transform* learning") and study abroad and (return or reintegration or shock or post or outcome or impact or effect)	220	35	8
AU Australian Education Index - 1979 to date British Education Index - 1975 to date ERIC - 1966 to date	(TRANSFORM ADJ LEARNING OR STUDENT ADJ EXPERIENCE OR STUDENT ADJ IDENTITY OR STUDENT ADJ JOURNEY).TI,AB. AND (GRADUATE OR PHD OR DOCTORAL OR MASTER OR STUDY ADJ ABROAD OR INTERNATIONAL OR OVERSEAS OR FOREIGN OR UK OR SOJOURNER*).TI,AB. AND (RETURN OR REINTEGRATION OR SHOCK OR POST OR OUTCOME OR IMPACT OR EFFECT).TI,AB. combined sets 1, 2, 3 (LIM from 2000) and remove duplicates	267	87	29
Proquest	(( transform* learning or student experience or student journey or student identity ) and ( graduate or PhD or doctoral or master or study abroad or international or overseas or foreign or UK or sojourner* ) and ( return or reintegration or shock or post or outcome or impact or effect )) AND PDN(>1/1/2000) ANDLN(EN)	279	65	39
Index to Thesis	(transform*learning" or "student experience" or "student journey" or "student identity") and (graduate Or PhD or doctoral or master or "study abroad" or international or overseas or foreign or UK or sojourner*) and (return or reintegration or shock or post or outcome or impact or effect)	44	10	10
Project MUSE	Transform*"learning	57	18	15
NDLTD	"transform*"learning""and""study"abroad"	56	7	7
Purposeful Selection		0		
ALL	Combined	1371		

### Appendix 5: Selected Studies for Review

Reference	Theoretical Lens
Alazzi, K., & Chiodo, J. J. (2006). Uncovering Problems and Identifying Coping Strategies of Middle Eastern University Students. [Journal-Articles Reports-Research]. <i>International Education</i> , 35(2), 65-81;	Grounded theory
Baker, V. L., & Pifer, M. J. (2011). The Role of Relationships in the Transition from Doctoral Student to Independent Scholar. [Journal-Articles Reports-Research]. <i>Studies in Continuing Education</i> , 33(1), 5-17.	Network theory and socio-cultural perspectives of learning.
Boyer, N. R., Maher, P. A., & Kirkman, S. (2006). Transformative Learning in Online Settings. <i>Journal of Transformative Education</i> , 4(4), 335-361.	Transformative Learning
Brock, S. E. (2010). Measuring the Importance of Precursor Steps to Transformative Learning. <i>Adult Education Quarterly</i> , 60(2), 122-142.	Transformative Learning
Chang, W.-W., Chen, C.-H. L., Huang, Y.-F., & Yuan, Y.-H. (2012). Exploring the Unknown: International Service and Individual Transformation. <i>Adult Education Quarterly</i> , 62(3), 230-251.	transformative Learning environment–person interaction schema theory (Piaget, 1975) Johari Window (Luft, 1969)
Chang, Y. (2009). A qualitative study of temporary reentry from significant others' perspective. [doi: 10.1016/j.ijintrel.2009.02.002]. <i>International Journal of Intercultural Relations</i> , 33(3), 259-263.	Re_Entry
Chapman, A., & Pyvis, D. (2006). Dilemmas in the Formation of Student Identity in Offshore Higher Education: A Case Study in Hong Kong. [Journal-Articles Reports-Research]. <i>Educational Review</i> , 58(3), 291-302.	social practice theory
Erichsen, E. (2009). Reinventing selves: International students' conceptions of self and learning for transformation. Unpublished 3387257, University of Wyoming, United States -- Wyoming.	Transformative learning theory (TLT), symbolic interactionism (SI), and the concept of intercultural competency (IC)
Faulk, D. R., Parker, F. M., & Morris, A. H. (2010). Reforming perspectives: MSN graduates' knowledge, attitudes and awareness of self-transformation.	Transformative Learning

Gill, S. (2010). The Homecoming: An Investigation into the Effect that Studying Overseas Had on Chinese Postgraduates' Life and Work on Their Return to China. <i>Compare A Journal of Comparative and International Education</i> , 40(3), 359-376.	'reverse culture shock' (Oberg 1960) Transformative dimension of intercultural experience Kim (2001, 2008) intercultural personhood:
Glisczinski, D. J. (2007). <i>Transformative Higher Education</i> .	Transformative Learning
Gu, Q. (2009). Maturity and Inter-culturality: Chinese Students' Experiences in UK Higher Education. [Journal-Articles Reports-Research]. <i>European Journal of Education</i> , 44(1), 37-52.	Identity formation
Hamza, A. (2010). International Experience. <i>Journal of Studies in International Education</i> , 14(1), 50-69.	Transformative Learning
Kung, H. (2007). Dancing on the edge: International students' transformative journeys in the United States of America. Unpublished 3271223, The University of Oklahoma, United States -- Oklahoma.	adult learning and development theories, chaos and complexity, transformational learning
Lennox, S. L. (2005). Contemplating the self: Integrative approaches to transformative learning in higher education. Unpublished 3184473, Fielding Graduate University, United States -- California.	Transformative Learning
Milstein, T. (2005). Transformation abroad: Sojourning and the perceived enhancement of self-efficacy. [doi: 10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.05.005]. <i>International Journal of Intercultural Relations</i> , 29(2), 217-238.	Culture shock ,intercultural sensitivity ,transformation theory Self-efficacy and communication
Morrice, L. (2013). Learning and Refugees: Recognizing the Darker Side of Transformative Learning. <i>Adult Education Quarterly</i> , 63(3), 251-271.	Transformative Learning
Park, K. (2002). Transformative learning: Sojourners' experiences in intercultural adjustment. Unpublished 3068021, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, United States - Illinois.	transformative learning (Mezirow) intercultural adjustment
Pasquariello, G. (2009). The way in and the way on: A qualitative study of the catalysts and outcomes of transformative learning.	grounded theory

Ritz, A. A. (2009). Transformative Learning and Short-Term Study Abroad Programs as Course Components.	Transformative Learning
Sariyant, T. P. (2002). Knowing and understanding through auto/ethnography: Narrative on transformative learning experience of an international graduate student. Unpublished 3039391, University of Massachusetts Amherst, United States -- Massachusetts.	Social change transformation through education.
Stevens-Long, J., Schapiro, S. A., & McClintock, C. (2012). Passionate Scholars: Transformative Learning in Doctoral Education. <i>Adult Education Quarterly</i> , 62(2), 180-198.	Transformative Learning
Sussman, N. M. (2002). Testing the cultural identity model of the cultural transition cycle: sojourners return home. [doi: 10.1016/S0147-1767(02)00013-5]. <i>International Journal of Intercultural Relations</i> , 26(4), 391-408.	cultural identity and repatriation
Tacey, K. D. (2012). Perspective transformation analyzing the outcomes of international education	Transformative Learning and international experiential education
Taylor, E. W. (1994). Intercultural Competency: A Transformative Learning Process. <i>Adult Education Quarterly</i> , 44(3), 154-174.	Transformative learning theory intercultural competency
Taylor, E. W. (2003). Attending Graduate School in Adult Education and the Impact on Teaching Beliefs. <i>Journal of Transformative Education</i> , 1(4), 349-367.	Transformative Learning
Wong, Y. (2008). (Re)forming incipient hybrid identities: The voices of female international graduate students. Unpublished 3330457, University of California, Santa Barbara, United States -- California.	Grounded theory Identity negotiation and cultural hybridity

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